



# THE KING'S HIGHWAY

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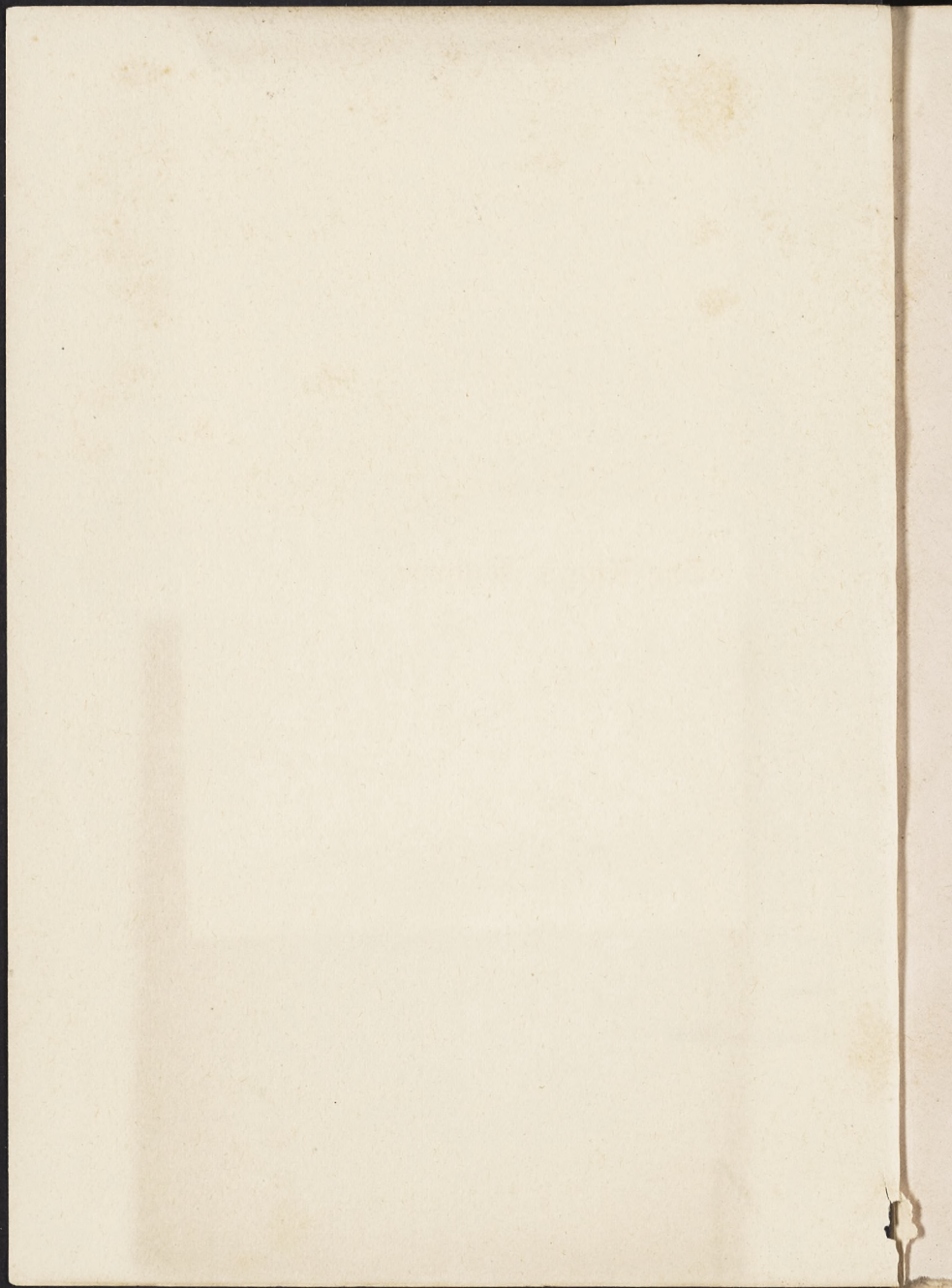
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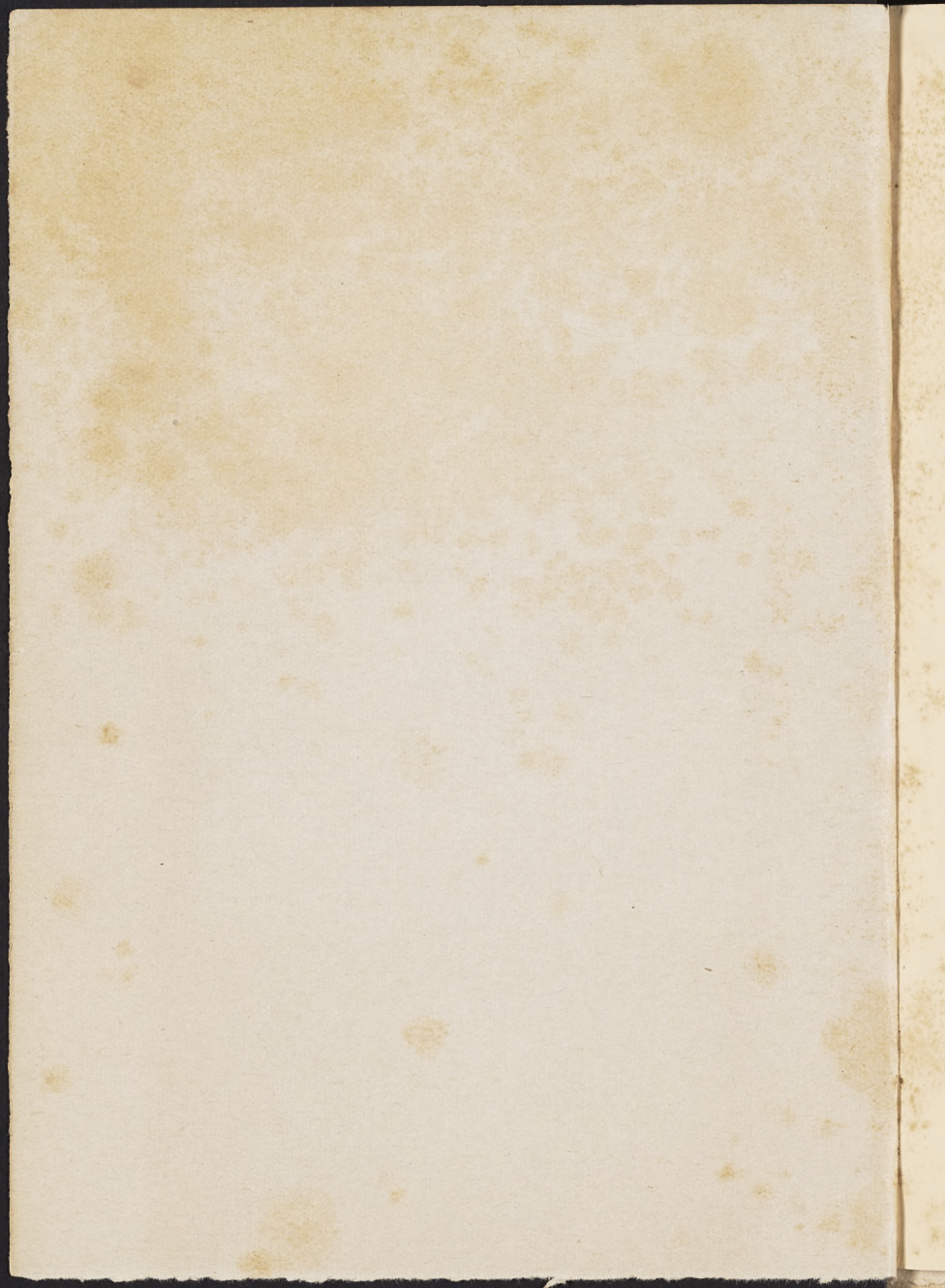
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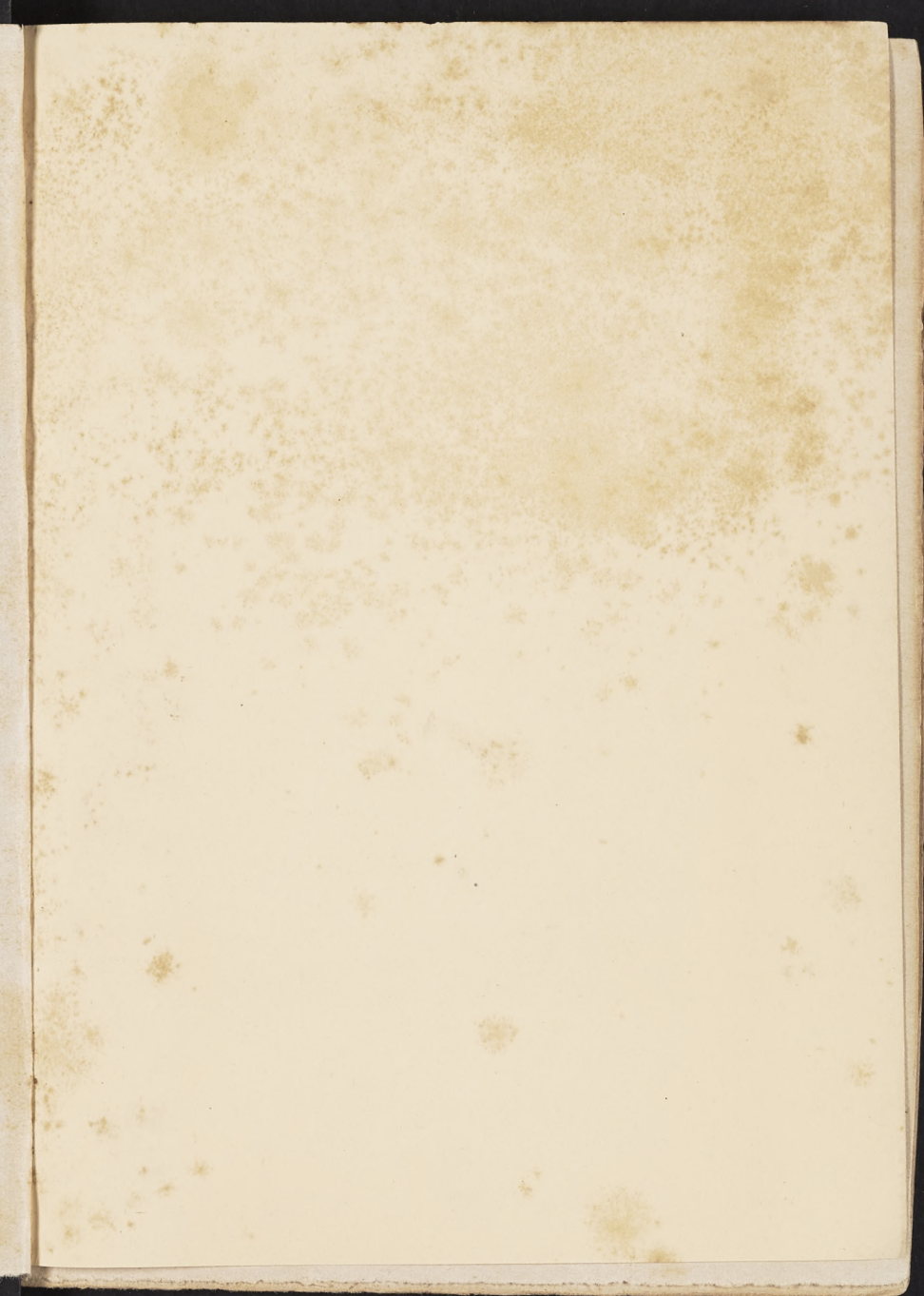




The King's Highway









The Author



# The King's Highway

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A Romance of  
The Franciscan Order  
in Alta California

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By MADELINE DEADERICK WILLARD

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1913

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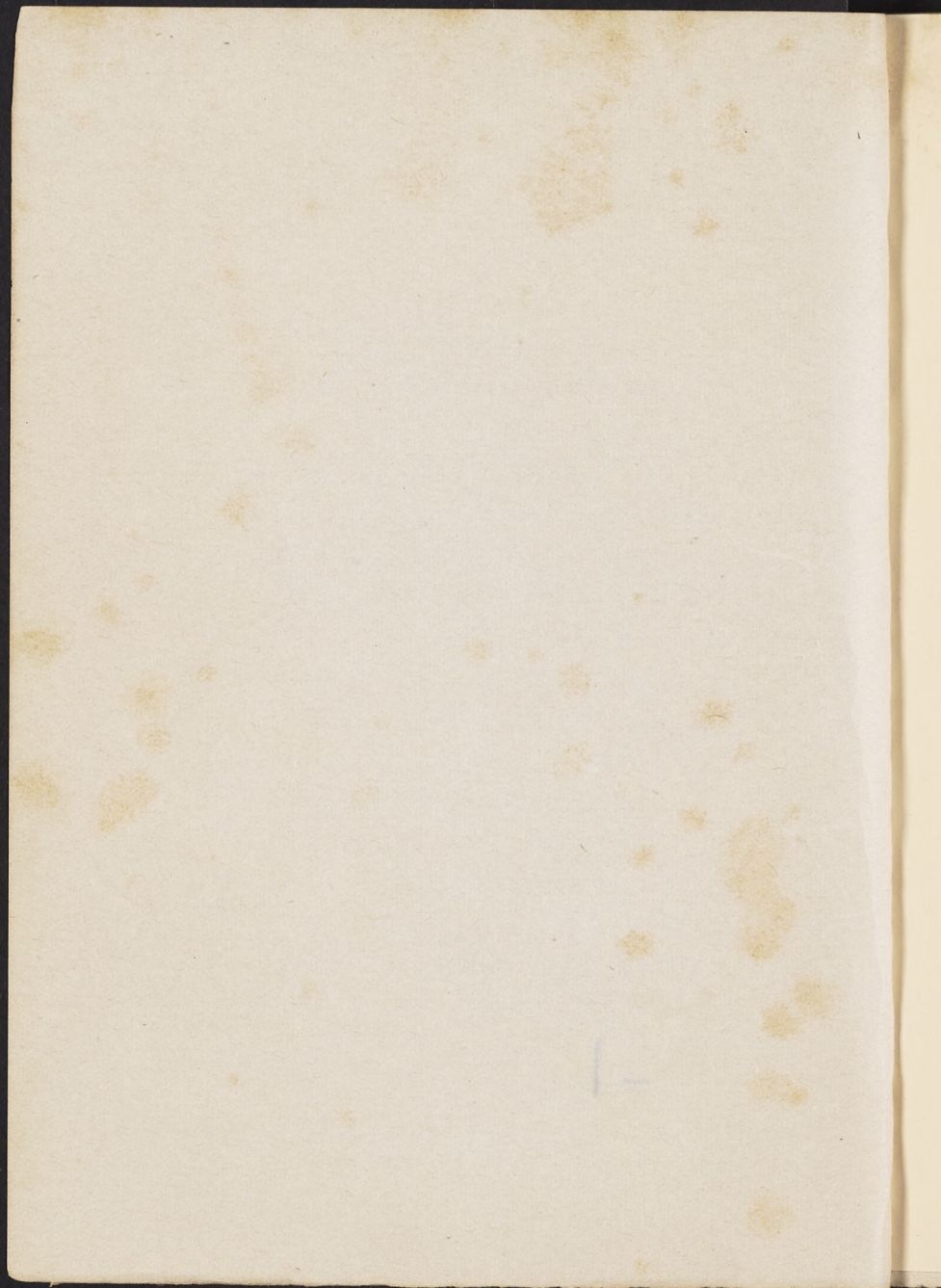








Photo by H. E. Roberts

The Ruined Church of Juan Capistrano To-day



## The King's Highway

### CHAPTER I

#### The Coming of Don Miguel

ON a yellow autumn day in the year of Our Lord 1806, Don Miguel first came to San Juan Capistrano, and the miracle of his coming was so great that for years it rivalled in popularity the stories of the saints and the outlaws. For where there is not only a miracle, but a mystery also, the thing is not forgotten soon. And so it was with Don Miguel, for the story of his coming reads like a page from some old romance.

September was always a glorious month in Alta California, and in the year 1806, the saints had not decreed otherwise. Over sleepy San Juan valley drifted a faint, gold mist that blended the kaleidoscopic colors of tawny hills, blue sea-water and green meadows into a delicious maze like the tones in a cathedral window. Across the green floor of the upper valley mottled sycamores trailed like slim, gray snakes, the yellow glory of their fallen leaves below them. Farther down

nestled the silver-gray of carefully-nurtured olive groves, between them stretches of green vineyards, tinged with autumn gold. For days the sea-wind had been growing less and less, and on San Miguel's Day, the twenty-ninth of September, it blew not at all. Even the winds, said the Indians, as they gathered the last purple grapes that afternoon, were bowing themselves in honor of the great saint. And those who drove the cattle on the southern ranges blessed the saint, returning thanks for a calm day. For, last San Miguel, had not Pico Juarez, the mysterious outlaw, driven away a whole herd of fat steers under cover of a high wind that muffled the noise of their hoofs? Such a thing would be impossible today, when a sound easily carried for miles in the still air.

On a central rise of ground that dominated the valley towered the great Mission of San Juan Capistrano; its white walls, red tiles and massive domes gleaming clear cut as a splendid cameo against the sky. Here was the life of the valley, the reason for all the carefully-tended vineyards, groves and wheatfields—a monument to the glory of God and to the faithful labor of priests and neophytes that had completed the beautiful church only a few months ago.



Few of the mission churches of Alta California bore as eloquent witness to the adoring love of their priestly builders as did San Juan Capistrano. A little to the south of the great, square courtyard and its surrounding cloisters it stood: a triumph of architecture, a *Te Deum* in stone. Built in the form of a Roman cross, with walls of solid masonry five feet thick, eight marvelous domes and a splendid bell tower, San Juan was an old world cathedral in conception and execution. But its builders were not content with massive grandeur alone. Wonderfully carved doorways groined arches and chiselled facings told their story of the builders whose tender devotion showed itself in small things as in great. The men who reared those walls labored not to their own glory. The worship of God and the helping of man were their concern. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

Padre Vicente Artillaga, burning dead leaves in the little garden in a sheltered corner of the great church wall, felt the spell of the day, and a certain feeling of sadness crept over him. Leaning on his rake, the priest lifted his eyes to where, far in the cloudless blue above, a scattering flock of cranes drifted slowly southward. A faint cry floated down

to him from overhead, and the man sighed. The birds were homeward bound, he thought, with a curious feeling of loneliness that seldom came to him. Padre Vicente had little time for vain regrets, neither was his nature inclined toward melancholy. And his sadness, if such it could be called, was of short duration now. Dropping his gaze from the sky, the priest seized his rake with a firm grasp, and began to stir the smouldering fire with vigorous strokes. In the still air rose a column of thin, blue smoke, and Padre Vicente snuffed its spicy fragrance joyously. He was turning to add more dead leaves to the flames, when the door of the west wing of the cloister opened suddenly, and a voice called: "Padre! Padre Vicente!"

The voice was brimming with suppressed excitement that made the priest drop the rake and hurry into the cloister.

"What is it, Juan?" he asked of the old Indian who had called him.

But Juan's answer was a confused jumble in which a dead woman, a young babe and a white shawl dripping with sea-water were strangely mingled. Padre Vicente hurried out to the western colonnade. There, in a crowd of excited Indians, stood Pablo, an Indian who had grown old in the service of



the Mission. In his arms he clasped a bundle wrapped in the damp folds of a white shawl, and over the heads of the gesticulating crowd, his eyes sought the padre.

"Pablo," said the priest calmly, "come this way." Waving the crowd back, Padre Vicente led the man into the cloister and shut the door.

"Now tell me what this matter is," he said gently, "and by the most holy San Miguel, I shall believe every word you say, for you are a trustworthy man."

Pablo cast an adoring look at the padre.

"This afternoon," he said simply, "Padre Mateo sent Pablo after the cattle in the pasture by the sea. When Pablo came there he saw a little boat on the rocks off the shore, and there were a man and a woman in it. The boat was breaking in two in the middle, and the people could not get off, for there were many rocks and the waves were high. Pablo could do nothing, and so he prayed to the blessed Virgin, but it was of no use. A big wave went over the boat, and when it passed by, the boat was in two pieces, and the water went over the boat." Pablo breathed heavily, and his voice trembled, as if the moment were yet with him. "Pablo waited on the shore," he went on, "to see if any should come ashore alive. But there came

none but this child in its mother's arms—and the mother was dead—her head struck on a rock." Pablo's voice was gentle now. "Pablo took the child," he said, "and waited to see if the man should come ashore. But he did not come. The water carried him away."

"Give me the child," said Padre Vicente suddenly.

With the greatest tenderness, the old Indian laid his burden in the priest's outstretched arms.

"And the child is whole, Pablo—he is not hurt at all."

"Quite whole, padre," said Pablo reverently, "quite whole. The mother's arm kept him from the rocks. It is a miracle—the holy saints have saved him."

"You are right, Pablo," returned Padre Vicente, "it is indeed a miracle." He pushed aside the folds of the shawl that he might look at the child. The little thing awakened, and its round, dark eyes gazed straight into the padre's own. It was evidently pleased with what it saw there, for it smiled, and, lifting one fist, waved it full in the face of Padre Vicente's thirty-five years of priestly dignity.

"Poor little one," murmured the padre compassionately, as he laid the child again in the



Indian's arms. "Take it to your wife, Pablo, that she may care for it. If she finds any mark on its clothing, let her bring it to me. And the mother—"

"The body is in the courtyard, padre," said Pablo quietly.

"Let the women prepare it for burial," directed Padre Vicente after a moment, "and if there are any marks that may tell who she was, have them brought to me."

"Si, padre," replied the old Indian, and carried the child out of the room. Then, because the Angelus was ringing, Padre Vicente made his way into the sacristy of the church.

\* \* \*

When three days had passed, a burial service was held in San Juan Mission, and afterward a christening. The burial was read for the mother of the baby who was christened, and both services were under the direction of Padre Vicente.

The most rigorous search had failed to reveal any marks of identification on either mother or child. The features of the mother, who was young and beautiful, were of the proud, Castilian type, but her clothes were simple and unmarked, and her only ornament was a plain, gold ring without engraving of

any description. The child, a boy of perhaps twelve months, was richly dressed, and wore about his neck a blessed medal of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The medal bore no mark of any kind, however, and at first the good padre was puzzled to know what to do concerning the naming of the child. Though careful search was made both up and down the coast, for the body of the man who was probably the father of the child, nothing was found. A strong offshore current at the place of the accident had carried away every trace of the wreck, and not even a plank from the frail craft came ashore. This fact was clear proof that the child had been saved by a miracle, for who else but the good God and His holy saints could have brought the child safely to land through the sharp rocks and beating waves, when all else was lost? But the saints must also have decreed that child's name should forever remain a mystery, else why was no trace left?

So Padre Vicente decided to baptize the child. For, he reasoned, since the babe brought no name with him, he must have a new one to grow up with, and to gain a new name, he must be baptized. The blessed medal of Our Lady tied about the child's throat doubtless indicated that the mother was a



pious woman, who died in the hope of God, and being pious, she must have had her son baptized. But of course there was a chance that circumstances might have prevented the ceremony. At any rate, argued Padre Vicente, it was certain that a second baptism could do no harm.

Accordingly, when the burial was over, and the prayers for the dead had been recited, both for the fair, young mother in the Mission graveyard and the luckless young father under the blue sea-water, the child was christened. The solemn ceremony was performed with holy water taken from the great baptismal font of carved stone by the hand of Padre Vicente himself, with old Pablo and his wife María as sponsors. The name the padre conferred upon the child was Miguel de Dios Artillaga; Miguel, because he came to the Mission on San Miguel's Day, and de Dios Artillaga because, as Padre Vicente told himself, he had a better right to give that name than any other, since it was his own name, and had been his father's. Besides, it was a very honorable name, that any man might be proud to bear.

From the niches in the transepts and above the altar, the Holy Christ, His Virgin Mother, and nine blessed saints stared with unwinking

eyes across blazing candles at the solemn ceremony, and the dim church was crowded with awed neophytes who had attended the burial service an hour before.

And so little Miguel de Dios Artillaga started out life anew at San Juan Capistrano, with a new name conferred with all the rites of Holy Church, a pair of pious Indian god-parents, and a holy father to watch over his soul—living as it were, in the very shadow of the sanctuary.



## CHAPTER II.

### The Greater Passion

OVER the valley of the Mission of the Crusader saint passed the gorgeous pageantry of the years, and found Padre Vicente still at his post. If a friend of the padre's youth in Old Spain had chanced into San Juan church some morning while the padre celebrated sunrise mass, he would have said at first glance that the man had grown older, of course, but that at forty he was the same man that he had been at twenty-one. The tall frame in the priest's robe was a little more spare perhaps, and the muscles were harder. The skin was browner by reason of much labor under the sun; but the tonsured head was not gray, and being shaven served only to accentuate the noble plan on which the head was built. The light of the sun and the cares of the Church had put some lines into the face, but it was the same honest, open face, and the magnetic eyes were the same. No, at forty. Padre Vicente was not another man than he had been at twentyone.

That is what one would have said at first

glance, but on second thought, the friend of the padre's youth would have said that the man was not the same. There was something in the face of the priest that had not been there in his younger days. It was what the world sees in the faces of certain saints, but not all. It was the seal of something invisible, but not unknowable, and if one had said that it was renunciation, one would have been only half right. It was all of that, but it was more. Moreover, if there are those of you who think that a priest's robe is an infallible sign of renunciation, you are sadly mistaken. There are several ways in which a man may don a priest's robe without renunciation, but Padre Vicente's way was none of these.

If a man, poor both in the things of this world and the things of the spirit, put on a priest's gown because it assures him a living and safety from a hard world, he renounces nothing because he has nothing to renounce. Also, there are those who, because their nature is cold to the things of this world, enter holy orders because they care not at all for any thing. In reality these are not different from the former, since, not caring for what they have left, they cannot know renunciation. Another class of those who know not the blessings of sacrifice are those who enter the



service of the Church as a last resort because of disappointment in the things of this life. Surely they have not renounced, since that which they love has been torn from them.

A man knows renunciation only when of his own free will, he leaves what he loves for the sake of a cause. Padre Vicente had done this to the full; but, because he had been urged by more than a sense of duty, he had known what was greater than sacrifice. And this, more than anything else, was the elusive thing in the face of the man of forty that had not been there at twenty-one.

The eldest son of a wealthy Spanish family of high estate, Padre Vicente, then known as Evaristo de Dios Artillaga, seemed destined for great things. Richly endowed, not only with worldly wealth, but also with unusual powers of body, mind and personality, young Artillaga was the idol of a host of friends. Keenly appreciative of the joy of living, he rejoiced in his great opportunities, and because of his marked qualities of leadership, he might have made a name for himself in the affairs of state. But Fate had cast the young man's lot in another direction. The friends of Evaristo's youth were not of one class alone, and among them was a priest of the cathedral in Tarragona. This priest was a man of high

character and clear vision, and to him was entrusted the mission of giving to the Church a noble son. From the priest, Evaristo learned of the splendid work of Junípero Serra and his coadjutors on the shores of New Spain. Like them, the young man became fired with the glory of missionary enterprise, and, after a hard struggle in which the spirit triumphed over the flesh, declared his intention of entering a priests' college with a view toward the New World. The elder Artillaga was a man of great worldly wisdom, and he opposed the purpose of his son. But the zeal of Evaristo was so great that it finally prevailed, and the young man entered the Order of Saint Francis. And herein lay a paradox. Possessing more of the good things of this life than most men possess, and loving them more, Evaristo de Dios Artillaga must have sacrificed more in giving them up. Yet, in another way, his sacrifice was less, since his vision was greater. It was not that the things of this life were less to him; but that the Cross of Christ was more.

So it was that Evaristo turned his back on the world that he knew and loved so well. And then, as if it had been decreed that the cup of life which he was setting aside should not lack one drop of perfect fullness, during



the period of preparation for the priesthood, Evaristo met the woman who ever after was the one woman of all to him. Even as his powers of mind and body exceeded those of most men, Evaristo exceeded also in loving. And as if this were not enough, though no word of love passed between him and the pure object of his passion, it was given to him to know that she loved him too. It was not too late yet to refuse the final vows—life and love were easily reached. This thing cost more—ininitely more to set aside than all the rest, and that had not been easy. Yet Evaristo put this behind him, as he had done with everything else. It was not that love was less to him than to other men. For, though many may not believe it, there is a greater passion than love. And it was this greater passion that had taken possession of the body and soul of Evaristo de Dios Artillaga.

Therefore, when Padre Vicente came to his labors on the far off shores of Alta California, he came as one who had known the whole joy of living, yet had set all aside for the passion of his soul. Perhaps that was the secret of the peculiar sympathy that he brought to the field of his labors; and certain is was that it was easier for the people to

believe what he told them of the love of God, because of the clear image of that love in the priest's tenderness for them. But, having set aside all that he had for the greater passion, Padre Vicente did not know that in time the love of God would require of him still more.

\* \* \*

From the blue of heaven the call of the southward drifting cranes floated down to the padres' garden, as it had on that day six years ago when little Miguel first came to San Juan Capistrano. But Padre Vicente, pruning the Castilian rose that nestled in the crook of the church wall, did not look up to see the birds. Instead, he was all intent upon the innocent prattle of little Miguel who played at his feet, digging with a trowel in the soft earth. Then Miguel, looking up saw the cranes.

"Look, padre," he said in his quaint Spanish, "there are birds."

"Sí, Miguelito Mío," answered Padre Vicente, still busy with his rose, "those are cranes."

"Cranes," repeated the child after him, "cranes, padre."

He dropped his trowel, and running to the priest, took a fold of the man's brown robe in his hand. Miguel was not more than seven years of age, but, living as he did in the



solemn atmosphere of a monastery, and listening to stories of the saints and chants of the Church where other children heard fairy tales and nursery songs, it was no wonder that he was old beyond his years. "Tell Miguel where the cranes go," he begged eagerly.

"Where they go?" said Padre Vicente. "Why, hijo mio, they are going home for the winter."

"Home?" questioned Miguel wonderingly. "Do cranes have homes, padre?"

The child thought for a moment.

"Did you ever have a home, padre?" he asked suddenly.

"Sure, Miguel of my heart. My home is here."

"But not like that," persisted the child. "You live in a big house with other men, but you have not a home. I mean a home like the home of Manuel," he went on, referring to one of his little Indian companions. "He lives in a little house with his father and mother and brothers and sisters. He has a home."

The priest was silent for a moment, and he forgot to prune the rose vine.

"Home! Father and mother and brothers and sisters!"

What memories the words awoke! Across the years the mind of Padre Vicente flashed

back to his ancestral home in Old Spain—his beloved parents, his happy brothers and sisters, his friends. And the woman who was now to him like a saint in a niche, put there out of reach by his own hand—who might have been all else to him—the priest shut his eyes for a moment. He had left them all to carry the Cross of Christ into the wilderness. The cost had been heavy, but all was as nothing beside the exceeding great reward.

"Padre—listen," Miguel was saying again. "Did you have a home when you were a little boy like me?"

"Sí, Miguelito, sí," answered the man tenderly. "Come here, beloved, and Padre Vicente will tell you a story."

Together the priest and the child sat down on the stone bench in the sun, and the man took the little one's hand in his.

"Once, Miguelito Mío," he began, "there lived a man who had everything to make him happy—home and father and mother and brothers and sisters. He lived in a beautiful house in a beautiful land, and he had gold to buy everything his heart could wish for himself and his friends. He was very happy with all this. But one day he saw something that was much finer than anything that he had—oh much more splendid than all his



beautiful things. It was a pearl, and when the man saw it, he wanted it more than he had ever wanted anything else."

The priest paused for a moment, and the listening child grew impatient.

"Please, padre, go on," he begged. "Didn't the man who was so rich have enough money, to buy the pearl?"

"No, Miguel," said Padre Vicente gravely. "There was not enough money in the world to buy that pearl."

"But I thought you said the man had a great deal of money, all he wanted," argued little Miguel. "Wasn't it like the pearl in the story you read in the Book—the pearl of great price? And the man in that story bought the pearl."

"Yes," agreed Padre Vicente, "it was like that. But the pearl in my story was not bought with money."

"How was it bought, then?" puzzled the child. "I thought money was to buy things with."

"Listen, and you shall hear," said the padre. "Money could not buy the pearl, because it was not for one man alone. He could not keep it for himself. It was to share with other people, and that was what made it cost so much."

"And how much did it cost, then?" asked the child.

"It cost everything that the man had," answered Padre Vicente simply. "The man had to pay much more than money. Home and father and mother—friends and the hope of joys that might be his in time to come—all these were the price of the pearl."

"And did the man pay the price?" questioned Miguel anxiously.

"Sí, Miguelito mío," returned the priest calmly, "he paid the price."

"What? Everything?" cried the child in surprise. "You don't mean that he gave up all that he had?"

"Everything, Miguel," said the padre.

"But the man in the Book didn't do that," said the child sagely, "he didn't give up his friends. He just paid money."

"We do not know, hijo mío," replied the priest. "Perhaps the man's friends wouldn't care for him any longer when all his possessions were gone."

"I hadn't thought of that," said little Miguel slowly. Then, after a silence, he lifted troubled eyes to the padre's face. "Was the man ever sorry that he gave everything for the pearl?"

Padre Vicente smiled.

"No, Miguelito, the man was never sorry,"



he said. "He was happier than he had ever been before."

The child drew a long breath of relief.

"Then it isn't true—what old Juana says—that you have to wait to be happy till you are dead?" he asked innocently.

"No, hijo mío," said the priest with certainty, "you do not have to wait."

Whereby, had little Miguel been able to understand, he would have known that Padre Vicente had already entered upon his exceeding great reward.

### CHAPTER III.

#### La Purísima

**A**LONG the bare, broken hillsides of San Juan the early rains brought autumn grass that year, and the tragedy of 1812 had not yet come to pass. The changes that had come over the peaceful little valley during the past few years were gradual but sure. The rancherías were larger and more thickly populated, and the flocks and herds that roamed the hills were more numerous and more prosperous than before. The olive groves were older, and bore heavier crops of glistening black fruit. Along the level floor of the valley, the vineyards and orchards spread more widely than in the past, and everywhere the yellow wheat-fields extended farther over the rolling mesas. All through the valley moved swarms of Indians at their work among the groves and vineyards, and in the cloisters resounded the swing and thud of the loom and the clang of the hammer at the forge. The bells in the tower swung over all with benediction still, but in the hearts of Padre Vicente and his brother priests



lurked a fear that in the space of a few years had grown from the measure of a mocking dwarf to the stature of a threatening giant. It was the fear of a premature secularization of the Missions. Beside this menace, the terror of Pico Juarez, who still lurked in the hills, harrying the flocks and herds and leading off Indians from the Mission, was like the shadow of a summer cloud. From the first the fathers had known that secularization must come some day. No one doubted that in the fullness of time, secularization would be the fitting outcome of the Mission system. But the fullness of time was not yet, and premature secularization would mean the utter ruin of the whole splendid fabric wrought so tenderly by the devoted hands of the Mission fathers. Desperately the fathers fought against it, and hopefully they told each other that the dread blow surely would not fall, until, softened by the fullness of time, it should be not a blow at all, but rather a blessing. But still the menace lurked in the dark, peering out of corners where least expected; and the heart of each loyal adherent of Holy Church in New Spain grew cold with the fear he tried not to feel.

The afternoon of the seventh of December, the eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, was warm and sultry in San Juan valley. Old Rosario, a huge, woven basket on his arm, and little Miguel trotting at his side, crossed the King's Highway south of the Mission buildings and plunged into a thicket of willows and live oaks that bordered the road. The two had come to gather green boughs to place in the church in honor of the morrow's celebration, and they halted first under a tall sycamore filled with clinging knots of pearl-studded mistletoe.

The child picked up a bunch of the gleaming berries that his companion had gathered, and thrust it into the basket, but it was plain that his thoughts were somewhere else.

"Rosario," he said slowly, as he looked wistfully back to where the broad trail of the King's Highway stretched away outside the thicket, "Rosario, where does the trail go to?"

"What? The King's Highway?" asked the old Indian in his husky voice. "It goes to the other churches. I have been as far north as San Gabriel, and south to San Diego," he said proudly.

"But after that—after San Diego, where then, Rosario?" questioned Miguel.



"Santisima! And have not the padres told you? To Mexico then."

"Oh, but I don't mean that," exclaimed the boy petulantly. "I don't mean just Mexico."

"What do you mean then?" queried old Rosario patiently.

"Oh—beyond Mexico and the mountains—what is there, Rosario?"

The old man shook his head.

"Dios sabe," he said piously, and crossed himself. Then, after a moment in which there was no sound save the chattering of the quarreling black birds in the branches overhead, the man laid down his armful of green boughs.

"Ask the padres," he said with the air of one who after much thought comes to the root of the matter. "Ask the padres. They know everything."

"My padre does," returned the child proudly. "but the other padres do not. My padre was sitting with the others in the garden yesterday, and they all looked at a big piece of paper with marks on it. There was one long, crooked line with many little dots beside it, and letters besides the dots, and I asked them what it was. Padres Mateo and Luis would not tell me, but Padre Vicente said the line was the King's Highway, and the dots were the Missions, with letters to tell the names."

"I know. It was a map." said the old Indian wisely.

"Yes," replied the child, "it was a map of the King's Highway. I asked them what that was, and Padre Vicente said that it was the trail that went past the Mission. Then he said for me run away and not bother the padres any more."

"And did you obey the good padre then?"

"Yes," said little Miguel quaintly, "the saints know I always obey! But first I told them that when I grew to be a man I would be a soldier and ride a big, black horse away off, far away on that trail. But Padre Luis grew very angry, and said that when I grew up I should be a priest, but never a cursed soldier! Padre Mateo said so too, but Padre Vicente did not say anything. I went away then, but I do not believe that Padre Luis was right."

"But why do you think that Padre Vicente knows more than the rest?" puzzled old Rosario.

"Oh! Because he did not say what he knew nothing about!" said the child sagely. "Padre Luis cannot know what I shall do when I grow to be a man. How can he?"

"Quien sabe?" questioned old Rosario. "The most holy San Miguel saved you from the



waves when a very young child, and the saints save people to make of them priests, but never soldiers. No es verdad?"

"The devil and the saints know!" ejaculated the child piously. Then, after a moment he rose from the ground where he had been sitting, and threw a handful of green into the basket. "Santa María! How I hate the devil!" he remarked irrelevantly.

"Callate! But but you must not say it so loudly. He might hear and be displeased," warned the old Indian, to whom the Evil One was always an avenging though unseen presence.

"Padre Vicente speaks of the devil when he wills, and I do not believe he cares to please him," said the child naïvely. "And it is true, Rosario, I do hate the devil. Whenever there is anything wrong done, the devil is at the bottom of it! When José and Mariano quarreled and hurt each other last All Saints' Day, Padre Vicente said the devil had done it. And when Gabriel ran away, it was the devil that made him do it. And Pico Juarez—is not the devil always with him?" Little Miguel paused, then, with the easy transition of a child, asked suddenly: "Shall you carry a candle in the procession tomorrow, Rosario?"

"No," replied the old Indian sadly, "Rosario is too old to sing any more."

"Miguel is sorry," said the child impulsively, "for, next to Padre Vicente and his dear Pablo, he loves you."

The old man smiled.

"I shall watch you when you march and sing," he said.

"Buenas gracias, Rosario," returned the boy politely. "I shall look for you. I am to carry the big silver cross. Maria has made me a beautiful robe," he added with pride.

"It is a sign that you will be a priest, Miguelito," said the old man. "I think Padre Luis was right."

The child laughed.

"Perhaps," he answered thoughtfully, "but first I shall ride on the King's Highway."



Over San Juan mountain, the sun rose lurid behind sullen clouds on the morning of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. There was no breeze, and when the bells rang for sunrise mass, the air was already stifling and sultry. From the fields came the uneasy cry of cattle, answered by herds on the opposite side of the valley. In the trees and vines of the Mission garden, the chattering voices of the birds were silent, and the stillness seemed



prophetic of impending evil. Flies buzzed in the corridors, and crawled over the white-washed walls and carved doorways in black swarms. It was a fit morning for a tragedy.

Heavy-eyed and sleep-hungry, the people rose from their beds and hurried into the church where mass was to be celebrated. Under the sky, the light of heaven was dim that morning, and the church, lighted only through the towers on the roof, was almost dark. On the pavement crouched a huddled mass of kneeling Indians, muttering over their beads; and from the sanctuary, Our Lady Queen of the Angels smiled down at them across the blaze of lighted candles. Suddenly, from the darkness of the north transept came the opening notes of the glorious *Te Deum laudamus*, and a procession of white robed neophytes carrying lighted candles, filed into the nave. At the head of the procession, bearing aloft in his hands a tall, silver cross, paced little Miguel. His dark eyes were big and solemn, and, in his white robe, with the sacred emblem in his childish hands, he was like the statue of the little San Luis in the church at San Luis Rey. Slowly the procession advanced.

"O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine heritage:

Govern them and lift them up forever!"

The words fell like a benediction upon the kneeling worshipers. Sweeping upward in a last imploring strain, the music reached its splendid climax, and the last notes died in the arched domes far above.

In the stillness that followed the chant, Padre Vicente rose from where he knelt before the altar, and stepping to the front of the sanctuary, began the opening words of the mass. He had not finished the first sentence, when a dull roar like distant thunder blotted out the rest of his words. A threatening quiver ran through the building, and the candle flames before the shrine of the Virgin wavered. One of the tall, silver candlesticks, placed too near the edge of the altar, fell over and the flame went out in smoke. Silence reigned for a hundredth part of a moment. The people on the pavement did not stir, and Padre Vicente began again the solemn words of the mass.

Suddenly, without further warning, a deafening roar like the thunder of numberless cannon rent the air, and instantly the solid, stone walls of the building reeled in the grip of a terrific earthquake shock. With a horrible noise of grinding stones and falling mortar, the splendid bell tower came crashing through



the vaulted dome in the roof, and sent the whole mass of masonry down upon the kneeling worshipers on the pavement. The walls of the sanctuary stood firm, however, and the shock passed as quickly as it had come.

A mist floated before the eyes of Padre Vicente. Scarcely conscious of what he did, the priest stumbled into the sacristy. There he met the frightened gaze of Padre Mateo, who began to sob and fall to his knees. Then Padre Vicente's vision cleared. Breathing a muttered prayer, he seized his brother priest by the arm and dragged him into the open air. In the sheltered corner of the padres' garden, the flowers bloomed in stately rows, and along the tiled paths all was as if death and destruction were not holding sway on the other side of the wall.

Praying as they went, the two, priests bent their trembling steps toward the main entrance of the ruined church. From all directions people came running. Then followed one of those hours of horror that always pass in the wake of every violent disaster. Amid the ruins of the splendid church, and the bodies of the martyred dead, the priests and neophytes worked like demons to save those who still lived, pinioned under the fallen stones.

And chief among them all for heroism and

endurance, was Padre Vicente. Careless of his own danger, he labored under the tottering walls to save his beloved people who cried to him from under the broken stones.

"O Lord, save Thy people and mine—Thy exceeding great reward and mine! Do not let them all die—not all, O Lord!" he prayed imploringly.

And when, after an almost superhuman effort, he had rolled away the stone that pinned the limp body of old Rosario to the pavement, a heavy piece of masonry, dislodged from above by the moving of the stone below, fell with terrific force against the priest's right arm and side. Padre Vicente staggered under the blow, and sank to his knees among the broken masonry, his lips moving in prayer. When he rose, his right arm hung limp at his side, but an invincible light burned in his eyes. Stooping beside old Rosario, he pillowed the head of the dying man on his knee, and, with his left hand, held the cross before the fast-dimming eyes. The old Indian did not hear all the words of comfort for the dying, but when his darkening eyes looked up and saw the face of his beloved padre, a beatific smile illuminated his features, and his spirit passed with a sigh.

Gently Padre Vicente shifted his limp burden to the pavement. He stooped to gather the



dead man in his arms to place him on an improvised stretcher offered by two neophytes, then remembered his broken arm, and turned away while another performed the service. For the first time, tears broke from the eyes of Padre Vicente, and rolled down his cheeks. No longer could he take the part of a man in the work, and his heart was sorely tried. Hurriedly he wiped away his tears, and almost unconscious of the pain in his arm, hastened to administer the last rites to an old woman who had been taken from the ruins, and who lay breathing heavily on the ground outside.

But, through all that hour of blood and tears among the pathetic ruins of the church he adored and the dead bodies of the people he loved, Padre Vicente knew, with a pain that went through his heart like a knife, that more than anything else to him was the sight of the limp body of a child in a white robe, that old Pablo had carried away over the plaza. Padre Vicente had found the child when he had first entered the church, lying where, struck by a flying fragment, he had fallen over the cross he carried. The priest had stooped and unwrapped the little fingers that still clung to the tall, silver handle. He had placed the still warm body in the out-stretched arms of old Pablo—silently, as the old man

had placed the child in his own arms but a few years before. The priest was not sure that life had gone from the little body, but he feared that the child was dead. His grief was terrible and, with swift self reproach, he blamed himself that this child should mean more to him than all the people that God had given him to watch over.

After a while the tumult among the ruins grew less. The dead and wounded were carried one by one into the courtyard, until finally they were all gone. Padres Luis and Mateo went with them, but Padre Vicente begged to be left alone for a little while. For a moment he stood looking with dazed eyes at the broken walls and the great hole in the roof that let the light of heaven into the sanctuary. A death-like silence brooded where the cries of the dying had sounded such a short time before.

Padre Vicente's brain reeled for a moment, and he put one hand to his head.

"Dead—all dead," he muttered as if in a dream. Then he sat down on a broken pilaster and tried to think. Was it because he was a wretched failure, that, after giving up all—riches and friends and love for the sake of the cross, the loss of one child that had happened into his life should mean more than



the destruction of his church and the death of his flock? His spirit was as water within him, and he bent his head in silent, agonized prayer.

"Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am human," he prayed. "I heard when Thy Word said that there is no man that hath left house or brethren or sister or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold, and in the world to come, eternal life. I heard, and I left all for Thy sake, and it was all made up to me—all that and more. Thy grace has been sufficient for me until now—O Lord, give Thy servant strength in this hour of trial!"

Then he lifted his head and ceased praying. Still there floated before his eyes the vision of the limp body of little Miguel as he had lain only a few hours before, prostrate on the silver cross. Was the child dead, or did he live? If he were dead, God had taken him for His own. If he lived—the priest shut his eyes for a moment as if in pain, but it was not his broken arm that hurt him then. Perhaps God had taken him if he were alive. With a feeling of great reverence, Padre Vicente remembered how the child had come to him from the very gate of death, as it were. He recalled with a joy painful in its sweetness,

how he had loved the child—for more than six years the little one had been the very apple of his eye. The other padres had always said that the boy was surely destined for the priesthood—that his miraculous rescue from the waves and his sudden advent into the very sanctuary of Holy Church could not mean anything else. Padre Vicente had pondered upon the manner of the child's coming even more than had the others, and had loved him more—the child seemed in a peculiar way to belong to him. Yet he had not said anything of giving him to the priesthood. There would be time to determine that, he thought, when the child was old enough to decide for himself. But, though the priest had never wholly admitted it to himself, there had been another reason for his silence. Always there had lurked in the background the specter of secularization—of dispossession—and perhaps a loveless old age in some far country. And, beside this, all unowned to himself, there had lingered the thought of an old age not loveless if the boy, unbound by priestly vows, were with him to love and to be loved. Miguel to be all his—all his! Padre Vicente had given his own life? Was not that enough?

A smothered cry escaped the lips of the priest as he saw clearly for the first time the



purport of his unacknowledged thought. He had been putting his will before the will of God Who had surely set His seal upon the child to make him His own—dead or alive. Like a flash there came to the priest the words; “and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” He had left all once—but once was not enough. For years, secure in the joy of service, he had looked upon the pain of sacrifice as something past and gone, for to Padre Vicente personal hardship had meant nothing. He had seen silver watches and two-wheeled ox-carts taken away from the friars by the padre presidente, who was always jealous of the sanctity of the vow of poverty. Neither trinkets nor the luxury of wheels meant anything to Padre Vicente, but love meant a great deal. Was the love of a little child a temptation of the flesh? Perhaps—if it went against the will of God. It might be that the good God had taken the child away as the kind padre presidente had taken the baubles from his monks—for the good of the soul.

Rising from his seat on the broken pilaster, Padre Vicente, strong man that he was, tottered as he made his way over the debris toward the altar, crying in the bitterness of his soul:

"Thou knowest, O Lord, that I am not worthy to serve Thee! But take not the life of the child because of my sin!"

Then, flinging himself on his face before the altar where all the candles had gone out, he tried to pray. But all that would come to his lips were the words sung in an uncertain, childish treble along with stronger voices only a few hours ago:

"O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine heritage:

Govern them and lift them up forever!"

Conscious of the meaning of the prayer in his own heart, the priest repeated the words again and again, and the peace of God, that passeth all understanding, crept into his soul. At last he rose to his feet, his face glorified. Then, as though speaking to One close at his side, he said softly:

"Again I give Thee Thine own. Dead or alive, the child is Thine."

Reverently closing the door behind him, Padre Vicente left the church as he had early that morning, by way of the sacristy. All was peace in the padres' garden, and now for the first time, the priest knew that his arm gave him great pain. Hastening into the cloister, he found Padre Luis, who set the broken bone and bound it up, wondering, as



he did so, at the strange light on his brother's face. But of that matter Padre Vicente vouchsafed not one word, nor did he ask concerning the child. Instead, he asked about the wounded neophytes, and when Padre Luis told him that they were calling for him, he would not rest until he had ministered to them.

After a time, old María came to where Padre Vicente sat in the courtyard beside a man whose hurts gave him great pain. Looking at the padre's arm in splints, and then at the glorified expression on his face, the good woman bowed low and crossed herself.

"The child is awake and calls for the Padre Vicente," she said in an awed tone.

The expression on the priest's face did not change. He rose and went with the old woman, whose reverence for him was plainly that for a saint. For, had not the good padre stayed in the ruins to pray after everyone else had left? Had not her own sister Juana, peering into the church an hour ago seen him at the altar in an attitude of devotion? And was not his face like that of an angel even now? Unconsciously old María sank to her knees before the padre as he entered the room where the child lay. But the priest took her by the hand and helped her to her feet.

"Daughter, I am human, even as you are," he said. "Peace be with you."

The old woman stepped back, her reverence all the greater. For, was it not divine humility that made the good padre speak thus?

When he learned that the boy was safe—that not a bone in his body was broken, and that his reason was whole—the padre knelt by the child's bed.

"Padre—Padre Vicente," said the child. "I am all safe. Do not feel sad, padre."

But the man's face was lifted to the light of the window and the holy joy in his eyes was like that of Abraham, when he knew that God had not required of him the sacrifice of his son Isaac.

"All—everything that he possesses—O Lord—Thy servant gives everything," he whispered.

The child heard.

"Everything—are you talking about the pearl in the story?" he asked sleepily. "I thought the man paid for the pearl a long time ago."

"No, Miguelito mío," said the padre steadfastly. "People find sometimes that to keep their pearls, they must go on paying for them until they die. And the man I told you about is paying for his pearl still."



"Oh! And isn't he sorry yet, padre?"

The priest patted the child's hand gently.

"No" he said. "No, Miguel of my heart.  
He is not sorry, for he still has the pearl."

## CHAPTER IV.

### The Champion of the Padre

**A**CROSS the green fields and vineyards of little San Juan valley filed the colorful procession of the seasons, until, six years after the tragedy of the Mission, a soft day in early April found Captain Fernando Ybarra and his troop of cavalrymen on their way from San Diego to Capistrano. The air was full of the eternal promise of spring that day, and on either side of the King's Highway, the fields were lush with grass and starred with flowers. All along the mesas and the broken spurs of the hills, gleamed the far-flung glory of yellow and white and royal purple; and everywhere the red-gold of poppies spread the altar-cloth of San Pascual.

Surely the day, and the gorgeous pageantry of the mesas together with the jangle of spurs and the rasp of saddle leather on the King's Highway were enough to set anyone's veins on fire with joy; but Ybarra, and Lieutenant Terrazas riding at the head of their troops felt none of these things. Only, as they neared San Juan, Ybarra noticed with greedy eyes



the fat cattle and sheep on the hills, and the rich wheat-fields on the rolling mesas.

"Dios mío! To think that all these riches belong to the lazy padres who eat their heads off in the Missions! It is a shame that so much land should go to waste!" he exclaimed to his companion.

"Santísima! But you are right! God grant that it may not be so always!" returned Terrazas piously.

The other laughed.

"I pray that the good God may answer your prayer soon," he said with a shrug and a wink. "Who knows but we may all have a fat share before long?"

But Terrazas, instead of answering, leaned over and caught the other's bridle rein.

"Look where you are going, and for the love of all the saints, tell me what that is!" he whispered hoarsely.

And then the troop halted suddenly where, a little way south of San Juan, the road comes to the foot of a long hill. There in the middle of the road, outlined against the deep blue of the sky at the crest of the hill, stood a horse and his rider—motionless, waiting. The horseman was only a boy, but he held his head high, and he sat his horse like a king.

Ybarra took a sharp look at the proud figure, then gave the order to go ahead.

"It is only a boy—but, Madre de Dios, he gave me a fright," he remarked to Terrazzas as the troop walked their horses up the hill.

"Caramba! But he sits his horse so like a man, and he might have been—"

"Pico Juarez, with a troop of horsemen waiting over the hill," said Ybarra jocosely, and rode on up the slope.

But the boy at the crest did not make way for the troop. Instead, he lifted his right arm in a commanding gesture.

"Halt!" he cried in a clear voice.

Scarcely knowing why he did so, Ybarra reined in his mount, and the cavalcade came to an abrupt stop.

"Who are you, and where are you going?" asked the boy, without budging an inch from his original position.

A spirit of banter seized hold of Ybarra, and doffing his hat he bowed low.

"I am Captain Fernando Ybarra, and these are my soldiers. We are on our way to San Juan Capistrano."

"Do the padres know that you are coming?" asked the child.

"They have been commanded by the Gover-



nor to quarter us until further orders," answered Ybarra politely.

"Then you may pass," he said graciously, and wheeling his horse, he fell into line at Ybarra's left bridle rein.

"And who are you, if I may venture to ask?" inquired Ybarra, glancing curiously at the boy's handsome features, well-worn homespun suit, and the spirited horse he rode so well.

"I am Don Miguel de Dios Artillaga, and I live at the Mission with my padre," said the boy with dignity.

"And what are you doing here, most worthy Don Miguel?" went on Ybarra.

Miguel shot the other a swift glance from under dark brows, as if he suspected him of making fun.

"I am watching the King's Highway," he said proudly. "It is well for you that you halted when you did, or I should not have let you pass."

Ybarra made no answer, but began chewing his mustachios at a furious rate. The boy looked at him suspiciously.

"Why do you chew the ends of your mustachios that way?" he demanded.

"It is a habit that I have sometimes," said

Ybarra in a queer voice, and Terrazzas choked with laughter.

"It is a very bad habit, and you had better try to cure it," said little Miguel. "What is that other man laughing at?" he queried sharply.

"He is not laughing, he is choking," said Ybarra, with a wink to the man on his right.

"Is that a habit too?" inquired the child innocently. "If it is, it is a very bad one. Quit gnawing your mustachios that way I don't like it."

"Are you going to be a soldier when you grow to be a man, Don Miguel?" asked Ybarra, changing the subject suddenly.

"A soldier? Santa María, no!" exclaimed the boy. "I am going to be a priest."

"Vilgate Dios! You a priest—you who sit your horse like a general of armies! How can that be?"

"The devil and the saints know that it is true!" ejaculated Miguel piously. Then he added: "and Padre Vicente says it must be true because San Miguel saved me from the waves."

"Aha!" sneered Ybarra. "I thought it was the padres who put the idea into your head. Who would be a fat devil of a priest when he could be anything else?"



The boy turned upon him in a sudden fury.

"Take that back—you cursed dog of a soldier! Take back those words you said!" he cried, his face white with rage.

Ybarra affected surprise.

"What do you mean, boy?" he asked haughtily.

"That the padres are better men than you know anything about—lying son of the devil that you are!" shrieked Miguel. "My padre could whip ten like you!"

"Dios mío! What a little coyote it is!" sniffed Ybarra, growing angry in his turn. "Let your dog of a padre try to whip me if he likes! He will not find it easy work, I can tell you!"

Miguel looked sullenly at the man by his side. His rage was over, but a cold hate gleamed in his dark eyes.

"You should have been here last Sunday," he said in a scornful voice. "Juan Mendez, a soldier twice as big as you are, from the presidio at San Diego, was drunk. He walked into the church after mass and insulted my padre—Padre Vicente. Padre Vicente said nothing when the man's words were all for him, but when the dog spat at the foot of the holy altar—Santísima! But you should have been there to see!"

"What was it?" asked Ybarra, curious in spite of himself.

"Well may you ask what was it," returned the boy proudly. "Padre Vicente gave the man one blow with his fist—a golpe such as you have never seen! The man is in bed yet, and the padre prays for his recovery."

"Santa María de Dios! What a padre it is!" mocked Ybarra. "We must be careful what we say, Terrazzas, in this priest's hole!"

"Yes, and be careful what you say now to the boy," growled Terrazzas, with a scowl on his dark face. "You will get us all in a pretty mess someday, with your sharp tongue."

But little Miguel, digging the spurs into the glossy sides of his mount, left the captain and his troop, and dashed ahead on the road to the Mission. Tossing the bridle rein over his horse's head, he slipped from the saddle, and burst into the quiet inclosure of the apple orchard where Padre Vicente was at work among the blossoming trees. Then he threw his arms around the priest's neck, and sobbed out his story against the man's rough gown.

"Do not cry, Miguelito mío," said the padre gently. "Keep away from the man while he is here. Say nothing to him, and he will not bother you."

"Yes, but—but he said that you—that you



—he called you a—something terrible!” sobbed Miguel.

“I know—I know, but never mind him,” said the priest tenderly. “He does not know any better. Promise me that you will not get into any more quarrels with the man. Promise, Miguel.” Even in his tenderness, Padre Vicente was stern, and the child looked up wonderingly through his tears.

“I hate to do it, but I promise,” he said.

“That is my good Miguel,” said Padre Vicente. Then he lifted his head as the clatter of hoofs and the jangle of harness came to his ears.

“Run away niño, while I go to meet the soldiers,” he said gravely.

Padre Vicente hurried through the orchard toward the cloisters, and little Miguel walked slowly over to the corner of an adobe wall where he found old Pablo, and related to him his morning’s adventure.

“And if I had not promised, I should strike that man across the face!” he cried, as he finished. “*Santísima*, but he is wicked to speak of my padre like that!”

“*Sí*,” agreed old Pablo, “he must be a very devil to speak so! But the good God will punish him, Don Miguel, God will punish him.”

"I hope so," said the child fervently. "Let us pray that He will."

Whereupon, the old Indian took a rosary of worn, wooden beads from his neck, and touched the cross reverently.

"Let us rather say a rosary for the good of the man's soul," he said. "The good God knows that he needs all the prayers that he can get! And that would please the padre more," he added, with the wisdom of age.

"Muy bien," assented Miguel reluctantly, "but all the same, Pablo, I had a good deal rather the devil would take him."



## CHAPTER V.

### Arms and a Man

**I**T was the hour before dawn. Long before the bells rang for sunrise mass that morning, Padre Vicente had risen from his bed and was pacing the tiled paths of the Mission garden. Far in the eastern sky the white star of morning still quivered faintly, and the cool dusk of night lingered yet in the fragrant recesses of the old garden. All the world was asleep—cloister and ranchería alike lay silent in the dim light of early day. Only, somewhere in the orange groves to the east, a sleepless mockingbird chanted softly to his mate. After a time, the priest halted in his slow pacing of the tiled path, and stood silent, his face toward the east. He might have been an Aztec sun worshiper as he stood there, his eager eyes lifted to where the first faint glimmer of day showed above the eastern hills. But Padre Vicente was not watching for the sun. He was praying.

To one unaccustomed to the ways of the Mission, San Juan Capistrano would have shown little change that morning from what it had for years. True, the splendid stone

arches of the church had never been completely restored since the earthquake, and the beautiful bell tower was gone forever. But the broken walls had been carefully repaired with adobe bricks; and Padre Vicente himself had helped to hang the four bells from the fallen tower in four carved belfries built especially for them in a niched wall west of the garden. And, twice each day, when the bells rang, swarms of dark-skinned worshipers from the teeming valley filled the church as of old. For three years, old Padre Mateo had been sleeping peacefully under the pavement of his beloved church, but his place in the Mission was more than filled by a young and energetic brother of Saint Francis, who went by the name of Padre Esteban.

No, it was none of these things that troubled the heart of Padre Vicente as he faced the dawn that morning. Nor did the fact itself that at the moment a body of rough Mexican cavalrymen slept under the tiled roof of the Mission trouble him. It was not the fact, but the significance of the fact. For all the rifts and cross-currents in the tidal wave of revolution that was sweeping over Mexico were felt in Alta California as well. Like a hen, jealous for her brood and scanning the air for hawks, Padre Vicente yearned over his child-



like people, watched the signs of the times, and was afraid. Even now a cold terror clutched at his heart as he thought of the hundreds of unsuspecting people asleep among the plenty that had been theirs so long. Any day the blow might fall that would shatter the whole structure, and what could his poor people do then? That was the question that long had been torturing the heart of the priest.

With a gesture of entreaty, he lifted his arms to the sky. The silver beads of his rosary slipped through his fingers, and the ivory Christ gleamed white in the dusk.

"Be Thou not far from me, O my God," he breathed. "Keep Thine heritage from the snare of the spoiler, Thy people from the power of the dog." As he prayed, his cowl slipped back, baring his tonsured head to the dawn. The eyes were pleading, but a look of hope marked the strong features. "Let me die," he whispered, "but save Thy people."

Then, as the thought of the boy Miguel came to him, an expression of holy joy lighted up his face. When great souls like Padre Vicente have given their all, they do not wish it back again. The years since his struggle in the ruins on the day of the earthquake had brought the priest no bitterness, but only joy. With holy fervor he had pictured to himself

the child upon whom God had set His seal, a strong man, an apostle of Holy Church, sent to lead her on to victory here in New Spain. He would be like a young graft set in the old stem of the Mission structure, thought Padre Vicente, and through him the Church would be saved her rightful fruitage.

"Let the boy be Thy messenger before Thy face," he prayed joyously, his face set eagerly toward the dawn, "and Thy servant shall have peace."

The faint, gray light along the eastern hills deepened into the rosy flush of widening day, and blotted out the radiance of the quivering star. Then, from all the vines and trees, and from under all the eaves, came the sleepy twitter of waking birds; and from the cloisters the stir of waking human creatures. The day was at hand, with all its manifold duties and dangers, but, more than all, its chance for holy service. Padre Vicente still faced the east, the cold ivory of the carved Christ pressed to his lips now. Then came footsteps on the other side of the belfried wall, and instantly the voice of the Angelus sounded in the still dawn.

"Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me," murmured the priest, and, turning away from the scarlet splendor of morning, set his



face resolutely toward the Mission and his people. The day had come.

When mass was over that morning, and the day's work begun, the sun was still low in the east. Falling through the corridor arches on the west side of the courtyard, the sunlight slanted full across the long seat where Miguel sat, busy at his daily task. In the deep-recessed window behind the seat, was an old silver inkstand. Into this the boy dipped his quill from time to time, and meanwhile traced laboriously on a sheet of paper, a score from the leather-bound chant-book open on the seat beside him.

"O santísimo cuerpo de Jesus sacramentido."

Slowly, in a sing-song tone, the boy chanted the words he had printed. So absorbed was he in what he was doing, that he did not hear the clank of spurs on the square-tiled floor, but when a shadow fell across his score, he looked up.

"May I sit down, Don Miguel?" asked Antonio Terrazas.

Something in the man's frank, winning smile must have pleased the boy, for he pushed aside the chant-book to make more room on the seat.

"Please sit down," he said with dignity, then added naïvely: "you are not the man who

spoke evil of my padre, so I may talk with you."

Antonio Terrazzas sat down carelessly, uncovering his head as he did so. He was a young man, not more than twenty-one, rather good looking in a bold way, with deep-set, black eyes, heavy brows, and a quantity of dark hair that curled about his face. Miguel thought him extremely handsome, and glanced enviously at the heavy, steel spurs he wore, and the brace of pistols at his belt.

"What are you writing there?" questioned the lieutenant, by way of polite conversation.

"Oh, that is the chant-book," said Miguel without enthusiasm. "I am copying a score for the choir."

"Do you like it—to copy songs?" inquired Terrazzas idly.

The child was silent for a moment.

"Well, not particularly," he answered honestly. "But it is my work. You know that the saints have work for everyone to do."

Terrazzas smiled.

"Read me what you have written," he said.

"You would not care to hear it—it is 'para alzar la Hostia,'" said Miguel. "You have heard it many times."

"So I have," agreed Terrazzas absently. He knew that the boy had been chosen for the



priesthood, and he was somewhat curious to know his attitude in the matter. Antonio Terrazas himself was of gentle blood, and had been brought up in the faith; but as a matter of fact, he had never given the Church more than a passing thought. Of course there were always priests, just as there were always doctors and lawyers; but why any man should care to enter holy orders had not occurred to him.

"And so you are going to be a priest," he said presently, crossing his legs the while, and stretching them out in the sun.

"Sí," said the boy quietly, "when I am old enough."

"Did you choose it yourself, or did the padres choose it for you?" pursued Terrazas after a moment.

The boy looked up quickly.

"The holy saints chose me," he answered with dignity. "That is what the padres say."

What the saints said and what the padres said might have been all one to Terrazas, but of that lack of faith he wisely said nothing.

"Then I suppose you would rather be a priest than anything else?"

"Yes," assented Miguel, "since that is what the saints have said." Then, after a moment he added: "I used to want to be a soldier

and ride on the King's Highway. But that was a long time ago, and I was young then." Terrazzas smiled at that, but the child did not see. "Before the earthquake," Miguel went on, "Padre Vicente did not say that I might not be a soldier, though the other padres did. But after the saints saved me from death in the earthquake, Padre Vicente too said that the good God had surely chosen me. So that is the way of it."

Terrazzas looked meditatively at the strong body and dark, handsome face of the boy on the seat beside him.

"You were not meant for a priest," he said slowly. "You were meant for a soldier! Santísima! But you look as if you had fighting blood in your veins!"

A strange look passed across the boy's face.

"Dios sabe," he said calmly. "Perhaps I have."

"How is that?" inquired Terrazzas curiously. "Don't you know?"

"No," said Miguel simply, "you see it was like this. Twelve years ago next San Miguel, my father and mother and I were wrecked in a little boat on the coast below here. They were both killed, and I was saved by a miracle. No one ever knew where I came from."

Terrazzas sat up suddenly, and his eyes



sparkled. He was young, and the glamor of things had not all rubbed off yet.

"Santa María!" he cried, "but you may be the heir to a noble estate! You should not be a priest, Don Miguel—your people may be looking for you."

A gleam shot from the boy's eyes, and passed as quickly as it had come. He had thought of that before.

"I am nearly thirteen years old now," he said doggedly, "and they have not come yet."

"But that is nothing—they may come any day!" returned Terrazas. "You should not waste your time—thinking they will never come," he finished rather lamely, remembering Ybarra's disrespect of the day before. Then he added cautiously: "Of course it is a good thing to be a priest."

"Yes," agreed the child readily, "it is. And if one could only be a priest like Padre Vicente, it would be glorious! When the sun comes through the roof while he is saying mass, he looks like a saint—he is splendid! And the sanctuary is like heaven, so bright with gold on the walls that I can hardly see—sometimes I have to shut my eyes! And the people—I think they would worship him on their knees if he would let them! Oh, he is wonderful, and I love him! But sometimes I am afraid

I can never be like him," he finished wistfully.

"You were fitter to be a soldier," said Terrazas knowingly. Then he drew from the holster at his belt a pistol, and held it up in the sun.

"What do you think of that, Don Miguel?" he asked irrelevantly.

The glint of polished steel caught the boy's eye, and he held his hands out eagerly for the weapon, while the chant-book slipped unheeded to the floor.

"O let me take it—just for a minute," he pleaded.

"Be careful—it is loaded," said Terrazas, and placed the pistol in the boy's hand.

With great care the child sighted along the short barrel, and fondled the handle lovingly. Then, with a sigh, he made as if he would restore the weapon to its owner.

"It must be fine to shoot with a pistol like that. I never have done it," he said wishfully.

"Then come with me, and you shall try," replied the lieutenant.

Instantly the boy was on his feet.

"Where shall we go?" he demanded eagerly.

"This way," answered the man, amused at the child's unfeigned delight, and together the two left the courtyard by a passage leading to



the western corridor. From there they walked southward around the church, and halted perhaps a dozen yards away from a group of mottled sycamore trees.

"There," said Terrazzas, pointing to a knot on the trunk of one of the trees where a branch had been broken off. "Do you see that spot?"

Miguel nodded.

"Muy bien," said the man. "Take good aim and hit the spot."

With a clear eye the boy took aim, then pulled the trigger with a steady hand. The ball sang through the air and buried itself in the bark an inch below the knot.

"I missed!" he cried regretfully. "Let me try again, and I will hit the mark!"

"Here is the other pistol," said Terrazzas. "Try again."

Miguel tried again, and this time the ball just grazed the lower rim of the knot.

"Almost!" cried the boy joyously. "I know I could do it if I only had the chance to try enough!"

"You shall have the chance," said Terrazzas, generously. "You have an eye like a hawk. I will teach you to shoot—if the padres permit," he added.

"I know Padre Vicente will let me," returned Miguel, blissfully. Then, at mention of the

padres, he suddenly remembered the neglected chant-book in the courtyard.

"I must go back to my work—I had forgotten it," he said with reluctance.

"Very well, then," answered Terrazas, kindly. "We shall meet some other time."

"Some other time," echoed Miguel happily, and ran back to the courtyard. There he went to work again, diligently copying the score from the old chant-book. But between his eyes and the page there floated again the vision of his childhood—a trail stretching on and on into the charmed distance, and a man with pistols at his belt, mounted on a big, black horse, riding, always riding on the King's Highway. The seed sown no one knew when or where—by a soldier grandfather in Old Spain, maybe had been well watered that morning; and, though little Miguel did not know it, he stood in great danger of forgetting that it was a soldier who had insulted Padre Vicente.

The days that followed were very happy ones for the little boy. For, in spite of the protests of Padre Esteban, who was young and zealous, Padre Vicente gave his permisison for Miguel to learn to shoot. With the wisdom born of intuition and experience, Padre Vicente knew that the thing a child is denied is usually the thing he wants most. And he did not wish



Miguel to choose the Narrow Way because he was strictly forbidden to walk anywhere else. So, though he saw what the companionship of Terrazzas might mean to the boy, he gave his consent to it. The good God would not suffer His chosen one to be turned aside, thought the priest, and daily offered up strong prayers for Miguel's safety.

Meanwhile, Miguel roamed the hills in company with Terrazzas. He learned to shoot, to shoulder a musket, and to command imaginary armies. He was more wildly happy than he had ever been before, and in a short time he came to feel for Terrazzas a love that amounted almost to a passion. Under these conditions, it was not strange that, when the boy carried the processional cross in the church the kneeling worshipers were an army in battle array to him, and the holy emblem he bore was a military standard. Beaming with pride, he would relate to Padre Vicente the soldierly exploits of Terrazzas, and Padre Vicente would listen patiently. It was a good thing, thought the priest, for the boy to get an idea of the world from some one outside monastery walls. Padre Vicente himself had been a man of the world before he had been a priest, and was the stronger for it now. But he did

not neglect to pray that all might be for the glory of God.

As for Antonio Terrazzas, he had started out to amuse himself, but, as time went on, he became conscious of a growing tenderness for the quaint, little fellow who paid him such sincere homage. If some one had asked his motives in the matter he probably could not have given any direct answer; though it may have been a certain love of fair play that made him want to give the child a taste of life before he should take upon himself the vows of a priest. As was said before, the glamor had not all rubbed off things yet for Terrazzas. At any rate, when the word came in July that the troops were to go south again, Terrazzas was sincerely sorry to part with the boy.

"Adiós, Don Miguel," he said tenderly, as he held the boy's hand in parting. "I shall never forget you, and I don't want you to forget me."

Miguel winked hard. It was not fitting that the friend of a soldier should shed tears.

"Adiós," he said firmly. "I shall never forget."

Then, as the troop clattered out of the yard with a great noise of hoofs and jangling harness, Miguel ran after them to the south gate of the Mission wall, his heart beating high. No, he would never forget. How he waved



his hand, and how he strained his eyes after them; forgetful of Ybarra, who had insulted the padre, remembering only Terrazzas, his friend! At last the horsemen disappeared as they had come, over the hill on the King's Highway. Slowly and sadly the boy made his way back to the Mission. Terrazzas had come and gone. He might never pass that way again, but in the heart of Miguel he had left his mark behind him.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Heart of Miguel

**A**FTER the departure of Terrazzas the days passed very slowly for Miguel. He was not so light-hearted as he had been, and he did not laugh so often. Padre Vicente saw this, and he was troubled.

"Are you tired of staying with the old padre now that the good lieutenant is gone, Miguelito?" he asked one day, as the two sat on the long seat in the courtyard.

Miguel turned reproachful eyes upon the priest.

"You know that I love you more than any one else in all the world," he cried fervently. Then, throwing his arms around the man's neck, he kissed him with a love that was not to be doubted.

But Padre Vicente was not to be satisfied. With an anxious light in his eyes, he watched the changing expressions on Miguel's face, and asked himself if he had been entirely wise in letting the boy be with the soldier so much. But always he clung to the conviction that God had chosen Miguel to be the help of the Church in New Spain, and through the Church,



the protection of the helpless people of the land. Surely God would not allow His chosen one to be moved. Meanwhile, Miguel was thinking thoughts he did not dare to tell the padre, and, boy that he was, a struggle was going on in his soul.

Then, on a warm night in late July, there came to pass a strange thing. For some unexplained reason, perhaps because the moonlight streaming into his window was so bright, Miguel wakened suddenly to see a man kneeling at the foot of his bed. The man's face was lifted to the light of the window, and Miguel could see that it was Padre Vicente. Fascinated by the expression on the face he knew so well, the boy could not stir, and lay as if in a trance. The white glory of the moon slanted through the recessed window, and gleamed palely on the sculptured Christ in the hands of the kneeling man. At first his words were inaudible; then they grew plainer, and Miguel understood what he was saying.

"Keep the people of Thine heritage, O Lord, and let them not be scattered," prayed Padre Vicente, his strong face pale in the white moonlight.

That prayer Miguel knew of old. He had heard it on the lips of the padre many times; and it is to be doubted if it would have made a

very great impression upon him now if it had not been for what followed. The padre went on, innocent of any hearer save the One to Whom he addressed his petition.

"Send Thy Spirit upon the one I have dedicated to Thee," he whispered, "and grant that he shall keep my people safe from harm." Then an expression of agonized pleading passed across his face. "Take the boy for Thy service, and let not the heart of Thy servant be broken in his old age," he prayed fervently. Then he dropped his head in his hands and was silent.

Miguel lay motionless as a statue, but his heart was beating so that he could scarcely breathe. Never before had he heard the padre pray like that. Always when Miguel had heard his petitions, they had been for other people, for the Church, but never for himself. But now he prayed that his heart might not be broken in his old age. And what was it that was going to break the padre's heart? It was that Miguel should not enter the service of Holy Church. With a shiver the boy realized that. Padre Vicente had never told him that his heart would break if he did not choose to become a priest. He had said that the saints had chosen him, that the Church needed him, but he had never said anything more personal



than that he himself would be very happy to see Miguel a priest. But this was a different matter—to break the padre's heart! The call of the King's Highway might lure Miguel from the service of all the Churches in Christendom; but never, never could it persuade him to break the heart of Padre Vicente—Padre Vicente, the man he loved as no other boy had ever loved any other man, with a passion amounting almost to worship! No, it could never make him do that! The boy was so strongly moved, that he was afraid that he would cry out and disturb the man who still knelt at the foot of the bed, his face buried in his hands.

But, long after the priest had risen and walked softly from the room, Miguel lay without moving a muscle, his face set in strange lines. Then suddenly he fell to sobbing, and after a time cried himself to sleep.

Very early in the morning Miguel woke, and dressing hurriedly, went out to find Padre Vicente. The priest was not in his room, but perhaps he was in the garden. Miguel would see. Hastening along the corridor, he entered the garden, when Padre Vicente, coming out of the sacristy, saw him. It was very early. The Angelus had not yet rung, and the priest looked surprised to see the boy there so soon.

"Good morning, Miguel!" he exclaimed.

"You are up early! Did you want me?" A bright smile illuminated the padre's features, that bore no trace of his midnight vigil, and the boy marveled. How he loved the padre, and what would he not do to please him!

"Padre," said Miguel adoringly, "padre, I have been thinking. I am thirteen years old. Is that too young to begin to study to be a priest? I should like to learn some things before I go to Mexico. Can I begin now, padre?"

The look of joy that overspread the priest's face almost frightened Miguel. Placing his arms about the boy's shoulders, the man gazed searchingly into his eyes. The look of fervent devotion there would have been enough to satisfy anyone. Padre Vicente did not question its object, and he was satisfied.

"The good God has been very kind to me, Miguel," he said, gently. "He has given me the desire of my heart. No, hijo mió, you are not too young. We will begin the studies this very day!"

But, had the padre known, the seed sown, no one knew when or where, and watered so well by the coming of Terrazzas, was not dead. Another was growing by its side, and for a time it was overshadowed; but the master passion was not yet.



## CHAPTER VII

### The Way of All the Earth

A GREAT many things can happen in eight years, especially in a time of revolution. And from 1818 to 1826 a great many things did happen in Alta California. Every shock of internal dissension in Mexico was felt there as well; and the King's Highway, built for the sandalled feet of friars and the march of the Mission guards, was a byway now for soldier of fortune and greedy politician. Mexico was full of wars and rumors of wars, and the air was thick with plots and political intrigue. Cunning schemers had their eyes upon the fat of the land, and the secularization of the Missions seemed imminent.

Therefore, when early in 1821, Governor Sola made public the decree turning over the Mission churches to the Mexican bishop, Payeras, then padre presidente, said that he was ready to make the change. The Missions were not ready, but what difference did that make? The padre presidente could not do anything else. However, when the matter was referred to the bishop, he said that he already had too much to occupy his attention, and that

as far as he was concerned, the California Franciscans could stay where they were. Later in the same year, Agustin Fernandez de San Vicente came from Mexico to Monterey to oversee the change in the government. But as no one there seemed to care what happened next, he found nothing to worry about, and proceeded to elect a new governor without delay.

By 1825 the Mexican Republic was fairly well secured; and in late October of the same year, Jose Mariá Echeandía came to California to take charge of the government. According to Echeandía, the Missions were not ready to secularize yet; nor would they be for some time to come. Thus secularization was deferred for a time. Yet, over the head of every loyal Franciscan in Alta California it still hung like the sword of Damocles, suspended by a hair and ready to fall at any moment.

The year 1826 found things at San Juan Capistrano very much as they had been for years. If it was a hardship to quarter government troops and submit to government requisitions of money and supplies, the padres learned that there was little use in protest. The Indians tilled the fields as before, and obeyed the voice of the Mission bells, but since 1812 there had never been so many of them. San Juan



Capistrano was declining. The padres knew this better than any one else. However, there was nothing to do but to remain faithful; and this they did to the best of their ability.

Padre Esteban had been transferred to San Luis Rey late in 1825, and as yet no one had taken his place. As for Padre Vicente, he still served, in company with Padre Luis, who was now over eighty years of age, and very feeble. Thus, responsibility came to bear more heavily than ever upon the broad shoulders of Padre Vicente; and he carried it as he had always carried all his burdens, cheerfully. It was a hard thing for the priest to see the decline of the Mission for which he had sacrificed so much, and into which he had built the best years of his life. For he knew now that decline was sure, and no longer did he struggle against the inevitable. He had fought a good fight, and he had no regrets. But, as men must always have something to look forward to, Padre Vicente still had his dreams. He could not give up all hope for the final triumph of the cause he loved so well. If the Missions were to be transformed into parish churches, and the Indian communities into pueblos, then, argued Padre Vicente, not illogically, a great deal would depend upon the parish priests. And was not Miguel, already learned in much

of the knowledge of the Church, almost ready to start for the priests' college in the City of Mexico? Blinded by his passion for the work of the Missions and his love for Miguèl, Padre Vicente never suspected that the boy's devotion was for him rather than for the Church. Therefore he was still very happy in his dream. The background of the vision had shifted a little, but it was the same dream still.

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Then, late in April of 1826, when all the hills were green, came a body of cavalrymen riding from San Diego to San Francisco, and stopped at San Juan Mission. One of their number, an officer, was too ill to go farther, they said—he should never have left San Diego. He was sick with a fever that he had contracted in the lowlands of Mexico a short time before, and even now he scarcely knew what he was doing. Would the padres take him in and care for him? The padres would. Tenderly two stalwart Indians carried the sick man into the Mission—a young fellow, apparently under thirty years of age, with deep-set black eyes and heavy, dark hair, that curled around the temples. They put the young soldier down in the western corridor; and when Padre Vicente saw his face, he knew that the man was Antonio Terrazzas. Miguel recognized his old



friend, too, and Padre Luis and old Pablo, his wife María, and many of the Indians remembered the man who had taught Miguel to shoot eight years ago.

But Terrazzas recognized no one. So sick was he that he could scarcely hold his head up. Gently they put him to bed in a quiet room off the courtyard, and made him as comfortable as they could. But, though the padres and the wise, old Indian women exhausted all their simple skill in his behalf, nothing seemed of any effect in breaking the fever that was slowly but surely sapping his strength. For days the young man would lie in a stupor; hearing nothing, seeing nothing, knowing no one. Then times of delirium would come to him, when he would stare wildly around the room, his eyes bright with fever, and talk rapidly in disconnected sentences that no one could understand. The padres and Candelaria, the Indian woman who nursed the man, said many fervent prayers in his behalf, and burned many candles; but it seemed that the saints did not hear, for Antonio Terrazzas did not get better.

For three weeks he lay sick; and during all that time he had not one rational moment. Then, not long after sunrise on a morning in early May, he opened his eyes and looked around the room intelligently for the first time

since he had come there. Just to open his eyes and close them again—that was all. Then he lay still again, for he was very weak. So weak he was, in fact, that he scarcely realized that he had a body at all. He could hardly lift his little finger, but his brain was as clear as it had been on that morning, years ago, when he sat with little Miguel on the long seat in the courtyard. He knew that he was in a place of rest, and he knew that he had come there to die. With a certain curious feeling of detachment he meditated on the latter fact, and wondered that it did not trouble him in the least.

For some time Terrazzas lay looking at the room with his eyes shut. He could do this, because that single flutter of the eyelids had printed the picture of it all on his brain, much as the striking of a clock that one hears, but does not listen to, repeats itself in the memory afterward. The room was like others common in the Missions and ranch houses of Alta California. The floor was paved with small, diamond-shaped tiles; and the white-washed adobe walls were pierced on opposite sides of the room by recessed windows that faced each other and opened outdoors in one direction and into a courtyard in the other. In this case, the east window opened directly outdoors, so that the morning sun shone full into the room.



Filtering through a vine loaded with Castilian roses, it fell on the white walls in round pools of pink light that quivered like the reflection from gently rippling water.

The room was scantily furnished, but very clean. Save for the rawhide bed on which the sick man lay, the only articles of furniture were a leather-bottomed chair by the window, and a little, square table with some vials and a brass candlestick on it. The bed was in the northwest corner of the room, facing the east, so that the first thing Terrazzas had seen when he opened his eyes had been a smoke-blackened niche in the wall by the east window. In the niche stood a little statuette of San José, a half-burned candle before it. Terrazzas wondered idly how many candles they had burned for him. However, it mattered very little how many, he thought, for he was going to die now.

For some minutes the sick man lay with his eyes shut, acutely conscious of every detail in the room. It has been said that when the knowledge comes suddenly to a man that he has only a few minutes to live, his whole life passes in review before him. Terrazzas had wakened suddenly to that realization after weeks of unconsciousness; but nothing of the sort occurred with him. Instead, he

lay and, in his mind, examined minutely but totally without interest, every detail in the room about him. He did not know where he was; but though his brain was perfectly clear, he did not care. He was entirely uninterested in the surroundings he was so acutely conscious of. If the little statuette of San José in the smoke-blackened niche had been standing on its head instead of its feet, Terrazas would not have wondered at all.

Then he heard men's voices under the courtyard windows. Or rather, he heard a voice; for only to one of them did Terrazas pay any attention. It was a very pleasant voice, strong and vibrant, and suddenly he knew that he had heard it before. Full of an exquisite quality of sympathy, it thrilled the very being of the man sick unto death; and like a flash the thought came to him that there was something he must tell to someone before he died. He wanted to tell it to the man he heard under the window. Eagerly he tried to raise his voice and call after him, but he could not speak above a whisper. Vaguely annoyed at that, he attempted to lift himself in bed; but sheer weakness kept him from moving so much as a hand. Then the voice died away down the long corridor. An acute distress of mind



replaced the former calm of the sick man. He could not die until someone came! Someone must come!

Then the Indian woman Candelaria came into the room. Hastening to Antonio's bedside, she placed her hand upon his forehead. The fever had left him, and he looked at her intelligently. But one glance at his face told Candelaria that the man was dying. Then she saw that his lips were moving in an effort to attract her attention, and she bent over him to listen. She could not distinguish the syllables, but she thought she knew what he wished to say.

"The man is dying and wants a priest," she said wisely to herself. "I will go and call Padre Vicente."

She left the room, and in a few minutes came back, bringing Padre Vicente with her. The priest knelt at the bedside of Terrazzas, but the dying man did not stir. Padre Vicente saw that he was too weak to receive the Holy Viaticum; and, holding the ivory cross of his rosary before the man's eyes, he spoke some words of comfort. But Antonio Terrazzas did not look at the holy emblem before him. Eagerly he lifted his gaze to the priest's magnetic eyes, and made another desperate effort to speak. Padre Vicente saw that the

man was trying to say something, and he bent lower to hear.

"My coat—" whispered Terrazas weakly, "the coat—I wore when I came—"

"You shall have it, hijo mío," said the priest with ready sympathy. "Candelaria, bring the coat of the señor."

Thus commanded, Candelaria brought the coat and laid it on the bed. It was a gaudy affair of green and red, gay with the gold trappings of an officer of the Mexican army; and it contrasted strangely with the somber brown of Padre Vicente's Franciscan habit. The priest did not look upon it with scorn however. He had been a man of the world before he had turned priest; and when he bent over Terrazas again, there was only sympathy in his eyes.

"What would you have me do for you, hijo mío?" he questioned gently.

"Take out—from the inside pocket—what you find there—" breathed the dying man laboriously.

Padre Vicente thrust his hand into the coat, and fumbled about for a moment. Then he brought out a small, oval, leather case, and held it up, a question on his face.

The eyes of the dying man, which had not brightened at sight of the holy cross, kindled



now. He tried to speak again, but he was growing weaker. Padre Vicente bent over him.

"The City—of Mexico—" murmured Terrazza faintly, "send to—Rafaela—" A strange expression passed across the priest's face, and he bent still lower to catch the failing words. "Rafaela—Montijo—my—" But the sentence was never finished. The words trailed along into the eternal silences; and the priest knew that Terrazzas was dead. Rising from where he knelt on the floor, he laid his fingers in reverent blessing upon the thick, dark hair where it curled about the temples. Lying as if he slept peacefully, the hard lines of his thin, dark face softened in death, Antonio Terrazzas appeared little older than when he had ridden gaily off on the King's Highway eight years before. But the King's Highway that he had taken now was a longer road.

"He was not more than a boy," murmured the priest compassionately. "May God bless his soul."

Padre Vicente had seen fifty-seven years pass by, but he had not forgotten what it was to be young. As he stood there looking tenderly into the calm face before him, something out of the past rose up and clutched at his heart. For a moment it was not Antonio Terrazzas

that he saw, but his own dead youth—himself as he had been thirty years ago. Padre Vicente sighed. Gently he picked up the gay coat, sparkling with its gilt trappings, and laid it over the still form on the bed.

“May he rest in peace,” whispered the priest softly. Then he left the room.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### Ashes of Roses

**A**S Padre Vicente walked quickly along the corridor, a tall, young man stepped suddenly from behind an arch and barred his way. The dark, handsome face under the wide sombrero was anxious, and its owner spoke earnestly.

"What news, padre?" asked Miguel, his eyes aflame with the question.

The priest looked compassionately into the eager face.

"The young man is asleep, beloved," he said gently. "The fever is gone—it will never come back any more, Miguel."

The boy's face changed.

"You mean that he is dead!" he cried, all the glow leaving his eyes. "that is what you mean."

"Yes," returned the priest almost absently, "that is what I mean."

"And I did not have a chance to speak to him!" Miguel's tone was bitter. "It is cruel—cruel that I could not speak to him even once!"

"Not cruel, hijo mío," returned Padre Vi-

cente soothingly, "not cruel. It was the will of the good God."

"Then the will of God is cruel!" exclaimed Miguel passionately. "He was the only friend I ever had—except you, padre," he added more quietly.

Padre Vicente sighed. He could remember the time when he too had thought the will of God was not always kind. He knew better now, but the knowledge did not lead him to forget. He laid his hand gently upon the younger man's arm.

"The will of God is never cruel, Miguel," he said with that exquisite sympathy that always read what one intended and met it half way. "He could not be cruel for He is Love. I have lived a long while and I know."

Miguel looked up quickly. There was a suspicion of tears in his black-velvet eyes. The padre went on.

"We are not always happy, hijo mío," he said slowly. Sometimes our dearest hopes—things we would give our very life's blood for, seem wrecked before our eyes. That is hard—very hard, and we could not understand it if this life were all. But this life is not all. I know."

Something in the man's tone carried conviction to Miguel.



"Forgive me, padre," he said humbly. "I was wrong." Then he cast an adoring look at the priest's face. "You are splendid," he said impulsively. "I can never be like you I know!"

"Choose a more perfect pattern, Miguel of my heart," said Padre Vicente soberly, "and you can be a better man than I. But I do not misunderstand. I have been young—in fact, I am not old yet," he added with an odd smile. "I was once like you, Miguel."

Miguel sighed. He was not so hopeful as the priest for his growth in perfection.

"Did he speak at all before he died, padre?" he inquired, coming back to the subject of Terrazzas.

"Scarcely at all," answered the priest. "He was so weak that he could hardly open his eyes. He died without pain, I think."

Miguel was silent for a moment.

"I will go and burn a candle before San Antonio de Padua in the south transept," he said at length, "that he may pray for the soul of the other Antonio."

"Go, hijo mío, and may the good God bless you," said Padre Vicente tenderly.

Miguel hastened across the courtyard in the direction of the church. For a moment Padre Vicente stood looking after him; then he

turned and walked rapidly down the corridor. When he came to the door of his own room, he went in and shut it after him.

Padre Vicente's room, or rather cell, was a small, whitewashed apartment, very much like the one he had left a few moments before. It was furnished scantily with a rawhide bed, a rough chair, and a table before the south window. In a niche by the window stood a figure of the Christ; and below the niche a small cupboard with panelled doors was built into the wall. Padre Vicente crossed the room, and sitting down in the chair, placed the little leather case on the table before him. Probably it contained a picture of the betrothed wife of the young man who had just died. She lived in the City of Mexico, and Terrazzas wished the picture sent to her with the news of his death. There was small doubt that this was the true state of affairs, and a glance inside the case would make sure. Yet Padre Vicente did not open the case at once. In the rose vine outside the window, a debonair mockingbird flashed to and fro among the fragrant blossoms, flirting his long, graceful tail easily from side to side. The priest followed the bird's movements closely, but there was an unseeing look in his eyes.

More than thirty years ago in Old Spain,



Padre Vicente had loved a woman whose name was Rafaela—loved her with all the pure fervor of which his heart was capable. He had come away and left her because of the greater passion that dominated his soul; but ever after the thought of her had been to him like the sweetness of remembered roses. In his long years of labor in New Spain, she had been with him always—not as the memory of a profane love, but as the actual presence of an enthroned purity, far above his head like a saint in a niche.

Other men might put away the memory of love between the withered petals of actual roses. Padre Vicente's memory held no such material tokens; he might not have kept them if it had. The memory of love lives longer than the passion they say; and so this man was fortunate in possessing no substantial remembrances of the woman that he had loved. He had never touched the petals of his roses; for him there had been only the fragrance. And for a long time the sweetness had been to him that of a dead rose—the memory of love had seemed to replace the love itself.

Sitting before his window that morning, the priest stared into the dark-green foliage of the rose vine, and left the little leather case untouched on the table before him. He knew

that he was afraid to open it. Not that it would seem a violation, for the case had been entrusted to him, and a glance at the contents would be necessary to the fulfilment of the trust. He knew that Terrazzas would have wanted him to open it. It was on his own account that he hesitated. That morning, the name of the woman he had loved on the lips of a dying man had come to him like a voice out of the past. It was as if the remembered sweetness of the dead rose had been suddenly transmuted into the warm fragrance of a living flower. More than thirty years ago Evaristo Artillaga had loved a Rafaela. This morning Antonio Terrazzas had died, the name of another Rafaela his last breath. Her picture lay on the table before Padre Vicente now; but the Rafaela that he had loved was lost to him. Would Antonio's love be anything like her? The two might be as totally unlike as night is from day; yet to open the case would be like uncovering a grave. It would be even more than that—it would be lifting the saint down from the niche; taking away from her the incense of dead roses and putting the odor of fresh flowers in its place.

It would be all of that, and yet Padre Vicente was not prepared for what met his eyes when he did open the case. Slowly he undid



the fastening of the leather cover and slipped it off. Inside lay a flat, oval locket of antique gold, bearing the initial R, followed, according to the Spanish fashion, by an elaborate rubrica.

With steady fingers Padre Vicente pressed the spring, and the golden cover flew back. And then it was as if the whole room were filled with the warm perfume of living roses. Actual petals that have lain in dust for thirty years cannot suddenly spring to a glorious resurrection, but remembered sweetness can rise again more wonderful than ever before. Padre Vicente shut his eyes, then the case. Burying his face in his hands, he let memory have its way.

"Many waters cannot quench love,  
Neither can the floods drown it."

For a moment, the priest saw again Rafaela; not as the enshrined saint of his thoughts, but the well beloved of his soul.

"Thou are all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee," he murmured reverently. Then he lifted his head, and opening the case again, looked steadily into the face it held. As well as he was aware of his own presence, he knew that the Rafaela before him was the daughter of the woman that he had loved. The deep, tender eyes in the picture looked

into his with the same high look that he had known before. If the painter had drawn the likeness from the face of the mother, he could have made no truer picture than lay in the face of the daughter. And if he had been seeking a model for the picture of a joyful, young angel, he need have looked no farther. His desires would have been all realized in that face.

For several moments Padre Vicente gazed into the locket before him. It had not been because he did not love Rafaela that he had left her. Nevertheless, he had left her, and he had had no word of her since. She had married, and this was her daughter. Did she love the man she had married? And was she yet alive? Padre Vicente was fifty-seven years old now, and a priest; but these questions came back to him as insistently as if he were young and a man of the world again. But the face before him held no answer.

After a time Padre Vicente rose and knelt before the Christ in the niche. He did not stir for many moments; but when he lifted his eyes again, peace shone in them. Gravely he picked up the picture, and shut first the golden cover, then the leather one. Opening the panelled door below the niche, he placed



the little case carefully inside and shut the door.

Men cannot give up their dreams once for all. Sometimes the pain of old sorrow comes back most insistently after years of peace. But Padre Vicente had not sacrificed his all for nothing.

"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off."

Those words had been his consolation once; and like a flash they came back to him now.

"Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me," said the priest simply. Then he went out into the corridor. When he closed the door after him, his hand was as reverent as if the room behind him had been a holy place.

## CHAPTER IX.

### The King's Highway

**S**PRING lingered late in San Juan valley that year; and the first of May found the hills still green, still redolent with the breath of flowers. Like the heavenly stream in the Patmos vision of Saint John, the little river sparkled seaward past trees bearing all manner of fruit. The Mission orchards promised rich harvest of the padres' skill, and the hand of the spoiler had not touched them yet. Peace brooded over the valley—the peace of the sky's cloudless blue; the peace of the great, scarred sanctuary that watched over all. Peace.

To Miguel, galloping south on the King's Highway, there was no peace; but a mad, unreasoning joy that filled his whole being and brimmed over into the atmosphere about him. The bubbling note of the meadowlark in the wheat was not a bird's song to him; it was merely part of all the inexplicable delight about him. The green of fields, the splendor of flowers, the blue of heaven and the delicious caress of the spring air all said one thing to



him—be glad! The time, the place, all, everything about him, went to his head and made him drunk with the joy of spring and youth. For one wild, unreasoning interval, he forgot that Terrazzas lay asleep in the Mission graveyard; forgot that he was on his way to Mexico to become a priest; remembered only that the day was fine; that he was young and that he was riding on the King's Highway.

Between smiling fields the road stretched southward before him. His horse was good, and he was glad that the way was long. He wanted to ride on and on until he was tired. Red-gold poppies might burn on the hillsides, and all the fields be bright with the purple of Spanish lilies and the pale gold of pansies; but Miguel saw them all only as a blaze of color, snuffed their glorious fragrance only as a whiff of the delicious savor of living. If only for a moment, his dream had come true. He was mounted on a good, black horse; the jangle of harness and the creak of saddle leather were in his ears, and the breath of spring was in his nostrils. Out of the charmed distance, something rose up and beckoned to him. He saw it, and everything that was within him stood up to answer the call. He did not stop to think that he might never

reach what beckoned to him; in his present mood it was enough that his blood should tingle madly as he rode to meet what had called him since his childhood. And as he rode, the picture of Rafaela Montijo lay warm over his heart.

That morning Padre Vicente had showed Miguel the picture, and told him of the dying request of Terrazzas. He was to carry the little case with a letter of explanation from the padre, to a certain Rafaela Montijo in the City of Mexico. With reverent eyes, Miguel had gazed upon the beautiful face in the golden frame. The story of it was simple; for Padre Vicente did not tell him of the other Rafaela. Gently the priest had put the case in the young man's eager hand.

"Guard it well, hijo mío," he had said, "that the owner may surely receive it. You could not go on a more sacred mission if you carried a message from the padre presidente himself."

His eyes had spoken more eloquently than his lips; but Miguel had laid that to the zeal of the Franciscan for loving his fellow man. He had accepted the trust loyally, but, as he rode south that morning, the picture meant no more to him personally than the caress of the breeze, or the sparkle of the little, blue



marianas by the wayside. For Miguel had never snuffed the incense of dead roses.

As for Padre Vicente, he had felt no misgiving in entrusting the picture of a beautiful woman to the young man who was about to enter the priesthood. God would take care of that matter. He had made the dream come true so far; and Padre Vicente was ready to trust Him the rest of the way.

Miguel rode a long distance southward before his first fine exhilaration left him. And when at length he did check the mad gait of his horse and settle down to an easier pace, his mood was not less high, but more thoughtful. He looked every inch a man as he sat his horse that morning. One would have said that he was a soldier, a gay caballero, a young nobleman, anything but a prospective priest. There was about him the same careless grace, the same unconscious fire that Terrazzas had noted years ago when he had said: "you look as if you had fighting blood in your veins." The look had always been there; but it was more pronounced about the man of twenty-one than it had been about the boy of thirteen. And yet the young man was almost totally unconscious of its presence.

The truth was that Miguel was a most extraordinary mixture of warring qualities.

His life so far had been passed within the pale of the Church. A strange babyhood was that within the walls of a Franciscan monastery; and it was little wonder that at twenty-one Miguel was at once old and young for his years. No mother had sung the little boy to sleep with tender lullabies, or begiled his waking hours with strangely woven tales of fairies and giants. His earliest companions had been the priests and the Indians; his earliest recollections solemn chants and pious stories of the saints. His playground had been the Mission corridors and God's great out-of-doors; and little did he know of the world and its ways. All these things had had their effect; and at twenty-one, in his habits of thought and manner of life, Miguel was a Franciscan. But, almost unconfessed even in his heart of hearts, the unknown heritage that he had brought with him cried out for something different. In the days of his childhood it had stood up within him and reached out at sight of the broad trail of the King's Highway that led on and on, away into the great world. It had wakened into quicker life at the coming of Antonio Terrazas. And, in the heart of the man, a vague, unsatisfied desire still smouldered ready to burst into flame at the slightest touch. But Miguel did not realize



this. The vague unrest had been a part of him so long that he did not regard it as anything strange. He accepted it as he accepted everything else, as the will of the good God; and today, as he rode through blossoming fields on his way to Mexico, he was honestly sure of his vocation.

It is seldom that people, especially young people, analyze their own motives. From childhood Miguel had known that he was destined for the priesthood. Everyone that had spoken to him on the subject had assured him of that fact. Only once had he wavered; and of that brief apostasy Terrazzas had been the unconscious cause. True, the beacon that had lighted his footsteps back to the fold on that occasion had been love of Padre Vicente. But it is easy sometimes to mistake the sign for the thing signified; and, if a short time after his struggle, it had been suggested to the boy that his vocation was a matter of loyalty to a man and not to the Church, Miguel would have repudiated the idea indignantly. For to him, Padre Vicente was the Church, and the Church was Padre Vicente. It has not always been easy for great minds to separate principle and personality; and Miguel was only a boy. Moreover, he was under the daily influence of a great personality. From baby-

hood, he had looked to the padre in everything; had poured out upon him all the love of which he was capable. And with his love was mingled reverence, adoration that amounted almost to worship. The man was his hero—yes, more, his saint. If Padre Vicente had stepped into a burning, fiery furnace, and holding out his hand had said: "Come," Miguel would have followed him cheerfully. And so it was not strange that when Padre Vicente opened the door of the Church, and said: "Come," Miguel obeyed without a question. Something of the heroic splendor of the priest's own personality seemed to invest his holy office because it was his; and the boy could not distinguish. In this, however, he was only like others, whose name has always been legion—hero worshipers who persuade themselves into the belief that they are devotees of a cause.

All these things had done much to choke out Old Desire; but Old Desire was not dead. Like a smouldering ember ready to spring into flame at an instant's touch, it waited in his heart. Miguel was among those who bore the cross; but he was not of them. He was of those who carried the banners; but, blinded by love of one who followed the cross, he did not know it. Today, as he journeyed south-



ward, he was unconscious of all these things; and knew only that he was riding on the King's Highway, and that something out of the distance called to him. He did not know what it was that beckoned to him—perhaps even now, Old Desire and the padre's calling were not entirely distinct in his mind. If he had known that what he rode to meet would soon fan the embers of Old Desire into glowing flame, would he have turned back? Who knows? At all events, he did not know; and so he rode ever southward on the King's Highway. Somewhere ahead that which he knew not, but that for which his soul cried out, waited for his coming. And as he rode, the picture of Rafaela Montijo lay warm over his heart.

## CHAPTER X.

### Rafaela Montijo

**P**ADRE Vicente had chosen one of the finest horses from the Mission herd for Miguel's journey; and when the young man rode down San Diego valley that evening, the sun was still a half hour high. Within a mile of the Mission, Miguel passed a typical California ranch home—a long, whitewashed adobe with wide veranda and tiled roof. One lone poplar mounted guard over the entrance at the road, and a thick hedge of tall orange trees bordered one side of the house. Smoke was rising from the kitchen chimney as Miguel rode by; and he looked at it curiously, as part of a life that he knew little of. For what should a man brought up in a monastery know of a home? Nothing from his own experience; but there is always the imagination. In his childhood Miguel had envied his little Indian playfellows their simple joys—father and mother and brothers and sisters, and a home within the four walls of an adobe hut. Now that he was a man, he no longer envied the Indians. But the blue smoke curling upward from the wide kitchen chimney



that spring evening aroused an old longing; and impatiently he spurred his horse onward. He would stay that night at San Diego Mission.

A few moments later, Miguel came in sight of the tall fachada of the Mission, and the green palm trees for which San Diego was famous. The white walls and red-tiled roofs gleamed splendid in the light of the declining sun; and, according to tradition, the young man should have uttered a pious ejaculation at sight of this first citadel of the faith in Alta California. But Miguel did no such thing. Instead, he caught his breath and almost lost hold of his bridle rein; for there on a big, white horse under the palm trees he saw her—Rafaela Montijo—deep in conversation with a Franciscan priest. The young man could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes, for that very morning Padre Vicente had told him that the girl whose picture he carried was in Mexico. But there she was under the palm trees. Miguel was as sure of that as he was that he was alive; there could be no mistake about it. There by the gate in the Mission wall she sat her horse; the light of the setting sun across her head like the aureole of a saint. Miguel thought her the most beautiful thing he had ever seen; and

there came to his mind the picture of a young angel by Murillo that hung in the sacristy at San Juan. Instinctively he took off his sombrero.

The girl on the horse turned. Miguel saw that she was taking leave of the priest; and as he rode nearer, she wheeled her mount and came directly toward him. She gave him one look in passing—such an impersonal glance as any noble lady might give a strange caballero on the King's Highway. But it was enough for Miguel to be sure that her's was the likeness he carried. Her face wore the same high look—there could not be another like her.

On she went in the direction that he had come; and she did not look back. All unconscious of the fact that his horse had stopped to nibble the grass by the way, Miguel turned in his saddle to follow her with his eyes. What should he do? Yonder, disappearing in that cloud of yellow dust, rode Rafaela Montijo, the woman whose picture he carried—the betrothed wife of Antonio Terrazas. Terrazas slept under the spring grasses at San Juan; and he, Miguel de Dios Artillaga who carried her picture over his heart, sat here without a word, watching her ride away into the distance. What should he do? Terrazas



was dead and the girl, did not know it. Decidedly it was the duty of Miguel to ride after her—to deliver the picture and the message. Yet he did not stir. Wide-eyed and breathless, as if he had seen an angel pass by, he sat in his saddle and watched the girl fast disappearing up the road. What should he do?

Suddenly a snatch of ribald song fell upon his ears. A Mexican soldier from the presidio, somewhat the worse for liquor, rode slowly past where Miguel sat. Looking from the young man's face to the woman now almost out of sight up the road, he drew rein.

"Console yourself, amigo mío," he said with a leer. "She's pretty, but you can't have her. She's mine already. I tell you—"

Startled from his reverie. Miguel turned upon the man in sudden rage, and laid his riding whip full across the drunken face.

"Shut your lying mouth—animal—!" he cried furiously, and instinctively drew back to defend himself. Strange to say, however, the man did not show fight. With a muttered curse, he wheeled his horse and galloped back toward the Mission.

For a moment Miguel sat in a daze, staring at the whip in his hand. He had struck a man across the face—he, Miguel de Dios

Artillaga who was on his way to Mexico to become a priest. He had not meant to do it—something had lifted his hand and bade him strike; he did not know what urged him. Mingled feelings surged in his heart—anger, triumph, astonishment at himself. What should he do? Suddenly his brain cleared. Gathering up his reins, he wheeled quickly and dug the spurs into the sides of his horse. He would follow her—Rafaela Montijo—overtake her, and deliver the message. Deep in the uttermost parts of his soul, smouldering embers glowed fiercely as if about to burst into flame. But Miguel did not heed them. With wildly beating heart, he galloped madly back in the way he had come. Somewhere ahead of him on the King's Highway, all unconscious of the sudden tumult that she had caused, rode Rafaela Montijo, and did not look back.

The sun hung low in the west now, but Miguel did not see it. Eagerly he pushed his mount onward, till at a bend in the road he came in sight of Rafaela. She had slackened her horse's pace; and instinctively Miguel checked his own speed. Why, he could not have told. They covered a quarter of a mile thus; she looking straight ahead, he following. Then the house of the lone poplar came into



view. With the manner of one on familiar ground, the girl turned into the entrance, and dismounting, gave her horse to a little Mexican boy who led it away. Then she went into the house.

From the roadway, Miguel watched her disappear. Then he dismounted and tied his horse to an iron ring in the trunk of the lone poplar. He would follow her into the house.

An old Mexican woman was feeding canaries on the veranda as Miguel came in. She stepped forward to meet him; and he pulled off his sombrero with the easy grace that was his birthright.

"Is the Señorita Montijo at home?" he asked respectfully. It did not occur to him to ask if such a person as the Señorita Montijo lived there.

Impressed by the noble bearing of the young man, the old woman bowed elaborately.

"The señorita is at home," she said with deference. "If the señor will do us the honor to enter the house, I will call her."

The señor would do them that honor, who ever "they" might be; and the old woman went in search of the señorita.

The room which Miguel entered was long and low, with a tiled floor and whitewashed walls. Several carved chairs and a table were

the only furniture; but Miguel felt at home because San Antonio de Padua and San José looked down at him from little niches on either side of the big fireplace. The young man did not sit down, but crossed over to the window and stood looking out. In the orange hedge that bordered the side of the house, numberless linnets were celebrating a sort of choral evensong. Many times Miguel had heard their soft twitter at evening in the padres' garden at San Juan; but the sound came to him now as from a great way off. His brain was awl with vague questions and strange wonderings. Rafaela Montijo, that morning unknown, far off, the creature of a dream, was under the same roof with him now, living breathing presence. What would she say when he gave her the picture? Miguel was full of a dread that she would burst into tears; yet for worlds he would not have surrendered the privilege of giving it to her. With abstracted gaze he watched the yellow light of the setting sun filter lingeringly through the green orange leaves. He took the letter and picture from under his coat and waited.

Suddenly the door at the end of the room opened, and Rafaela Montijo came in. Miguel turned and saw her, and for an instant neither



spoke. To Miguel it was if the angel in the sacristy at San Juan had stepped down out of the frame and stood before him in flesh and blood. Outlined against the glow of the western window, she wore again the aureole that had lighted her head when he had first seen her under the palm trees at San Diego Mission; and Miguel felt once more the reverence that had possessed him then. He stepped forward.

"Señorita Rafaela Montijo?" he questioned steadily.

"Sí, señor," answered the girl slowly, and waited for him to speak again. With a sudden rush of feeling, Miguel noted that she was very young, not more than nineteen or twenty. There was something intensely appealing about the clear, direct gaze of the dark eyes she lifted to his; and suddenly Miguel thought of Terrazzas asleep in the padres' graveyard. How he must have loved her!

"I am Miguel de Dios Artillaga, and I bring you a message from Padre Vicente Artillaga at San Juan Capistrano," said the young man simply. "He thought that you were in the City of Mexico."

"And you found me here." Her gaze was puzzled. "I do not know Padre Vicente. What message has he for me?"

"This, señorita." Miguel placed the little package and the letter in the girl's hands. His heart beat fast, but his voice was steady.

The look of wonder did not leave her eyes.

"Muchas gracias, señor," said the girl. "May I ask you to wait one moment while I read the letter? There may be an answer."

Miguel knew in his soul that there was no answer, but he said nothing. The girl turned to the window to read the letter and Miguel walked over to the fireplace where he stood before the little figure of San Antonio de Padua. Would that the good saint of Padua might watch over the loved one of his namesake now!

For several moments the girl at the window gave no sign. The daylight was failing, and the twitter of the linnets in the oranges grew gradually fainter. To Miguel it seemed as if hours had passed since he had taken his stand before the niche of San Antonio. Then Rafaela Montijo turned and laid the letter and the picture on the table by the fireplace.

"So Antonio is dead," she said in a strange voice. Then she added without a tremor in her tone, "I know that he was dead. If he had not died, I should have had news of him before this."

The marked calm of the girl's manner



nonplussed Miguel. He would not have been surprised had she broken into a passion of tears; but this—was this the way a woman met the news of her lover's death? He forgot that he was only the bearer of the message, and he spoke the question that trembled on his lips.

"And you—you loved him?"

Her deep eyes opened wide, and a hurt look crept into them.

"I loved him?" she echoed slowly. "No, I never loved him."

Her manner was as innocent as that of a child, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world to speak thus with her.

"But he carried your picture," protested Miguel in honest bewilderment.

"Yes," she answered, "he carried my picture. He loved me." Then after a moment she added as if to herself, "I did not love him, but he was the only friend I had."

"He was my friend too," said Miguel.

"Your friend? Where did you know him?" asked Rafaela Montijo.

"At San Juan Capistrano, eight years ago," returned Miguel. "When I was a child, he was my friend. He was very dear to me," he added loyally.

Suddenly the girl's manner lost its calm.

Her deep eyes filled; and throwing herself into a chair by the table, she hid her face in her hands. For a moment she sat thus; then she lifted her face, and the man across the table saw that it was wet with tears. When she spoke, her voice was not the same as it had been. It was very tender.

"Antonio was my good friend," she said. "Sit down and tell me what you know about him."

Obediently Miguel took a seat opposite the girl and told all that he knew of Antonio Terrazas. While he spoke, Rafaela kept her clear, appealing gaze on his face, and when he finished, she drew a long breath.

"Poor Antonio," she said softly. "He loved me—he was very good to me." She paused a moment, then went on. "I think you do not understand. If he had lived, I should have married him. But I did not love him as a woman wants to love the man she marries."

Miguel nodded silently. It did not seem at all strange that they two should speak thus intimately when they had met only a few moments before. The girl went on.

"I promised to marry him—because—" she hesitated—"because it seemed best. He knew that I did not love him. Last winter he left the City of Mexico. He told me that he was



going on a dangerous mission, that perhaps he would not see me again. He would be happier if he carried my picture with him." There was a little quiver in her voice, and she hurried on. "I gave him my picture and he took it away with him. He is dead, and you have brought it to me again. He was very good to me—poor Antonio," she finished pathetically.

It was almost dark now, and the voices of the linnets had ceased. Silence reigned for a moment, then Miguel rose in his place.

"May the good God keep his soul and you, señorita," he said reverently.

"I pray that He will," answered Rafaela. Then she rose too. The old Mexican woman came in, and placing two lighted candles in brass holders on the table, went out again silently. Across the soft flame of the candles the girl looked at Miguel; and again he thought of the angel at San Juan.

"You were his friend," she said gently. "You loved him. I thank you for bringing me the message."

"Do not speak of it, señorita," replied Miguel. "It was nothing."

"Yes, it was a great deal," insisted Rafaela. "He was my good friend and I wish that I could have loved him. You brought him to

my remembrance, and for that I thank you."

Her eyes were full of an exquisite tenderness, and Miguel, looking into them, no longer pitied Terrazas asleep in the padres' graveyard at San Juan. Wonderful indeed it must have been to love her; but to know that she did not love him—it were better to go down into silence.

"Good night, señorita," he said. "May the peace of God be with you."

"And with you also," answered Rafaela. He had said that he was going to be a priest. How gentle he was, she thought, and yet how strong! There was an air of a man of the world about him though—she had never seen a priest like him. Perhaps if Antonio had been more like this man—but Antonio was dead. She looked at Miguel once more across the candles.

"Good night," she said. Then he was gone, and she was alone in the room. Taking one of the lighted candles, she placed it before the figure of San Antonio.

"Peace," she whispered softly, and fell on her knees.

Outside, Miguel looking up at the starry heavens, walked rapidly toward the gate. Darkness and silence had come over the place.

Before him the lone poplar loomed black,



like one giant monk in somber gown. The young man sighed. The mission entrusted to him by Padre Vicente fulfilled, he was years older than when he had entered that gate an hour before. A gay, young caballero would have said that this was the beginning of a romantic attachment; but Miguel knew nothing of romantic attachments. He did not try to classify the strange feelings that surged over him; he could not have done so had he tried.

At the gate he stopped and fumbled at the iron ring in the trunk of the poplar where he had tied his horse. The horse was not there. How could he have gotten away? He had been tied securely. It was growing darker now, and strain his eyes as he could, Miguel did not see the horse anywhere. He was not greatly disturbed however. It was not likely that anyone had stolen his mount—horses were too plentiful for that. Perhaps the little Mexican boy who had taken Rafaela's horse had taken his too, to keep it for him. He would not bother to look for it now, in the dark. The Mission was not more than a mile distant, and he could easily walk. Accordingly he set out at a good, round pace down the road.

Miguel had not gone far, when, under a liveoak that overhung the road, he stumbled

and fell. Somewhat annoyed, he tried to get up. But he could not. His legs were tangled in a twisted rope that pulled tightly toward the side of the road. Then he heard the sound of someone crawling heavily toward him through the grass and dead leaves. The light of a lantern flashed in his eyes; and in that instant he saw before him the face of the man he had struck that afternoon, a long red line across it where his whip had cut. The man leered evilly at him, and Miguel struggled vainly for a second. Then something hard struck the left side of his head, and he knew no more for a while.



## CHAPTER XI.

### La Enciña

WHEN Miguel came to his senses, he was lying under a spreading live-oak in an open field. The moon was shining brightly, and its white light gleamed fitfully through the thick foliage of the tree. Across the faintly glowing embers of a dying fire Miguel saw the form of a sleeping man. Who was he, and how had he come there? Miguel did not know. He did not know either how he himself had come there. He tried to sit up, but he was tangled clumsily in twists of knotted rope. There was a strange numbness in his head; and when he tried to move, a sharp pain ran violently through his left leg. What could be the matter? He had been hurt, and he was tied. Who had done it? Was it the man who slept there? A sudden gust of wind swept under the tree, fanning the dying embers into brief flame. The fire flared up, casting a weird light over the face of the man who slept beside it; and Miguel saw that a long, red line lay across his forehead and right cheek. He wondered how the mark

had come there. At any rate the thing to do was to get away from this place as fast as possible.

With a sudden effort that racked every nerve in his bruised body, Miguel sat up. The man by the fire did not wake. Apparently he must sleep very deeply. Cautiously Miguel tried to free his right arm and after a moment he succeeded. Knots tied by a drunken man do not always hold very well; and after a time he was free. Eagerly he tried to rise to his feet, but he fell back with a stifled groan. His left leg would not move; and when he tried to stand, a flash of exquisite pain shot through his whole body. He lay back and thought for a moment. Very well then, if he could not walk, he could crawl. He must get away from here at any cost. Just why, he did not know, but he entertained vague suspicions of the man by the fire.

After a moment, Miguel turned over and started to crawl away, dragging his hurt leg after him. That every movement caused him racking pain did not matter. He was possessed of only one idea—to get away from the man under the tree. As he moved, the dry leaves on the ground under him crackled sharply; and the man by the fire rolled over, cursing drunkenly in his sleep. Instinct with



fear, Miguel paused, but the man gave no further sign. He slept the sleep, not of the just, but of those who have drunk too deeply.

Miguel started again to crawl, and in a moment he came out from under the shadow of the tree into the clear moonlight of the open field. A night breeze swayed softly among the growing wheat; and a little way off across the field the house of the lone poplar gleamed white under the moon. Miguel looked at the house with the tall tree beside it; and suddenly all that had happened came back to him with a rush.

"Rafaela—Rafaela Montijo," he murmured weakly.

He would go to her. Painfully he began his weary pilgrimage across the wheat-field. The rough ground hurt his hands, and the grain stalks, wet with dew of night, brushed against his face and cut it. Every move was torture to his racked body, but still he toiled on. He must get away from the man under the liveoak; he must reach the house of the lone poplar! The little way across the field seemed leagues to him. Several times, almost fainting with pain and exhaustion, he stopped to rest. But each time he pushed on again indomitably.

A little way below the orange hedge at

the end of the field, he paused before the dead branch of a tree in his way. His head was throbbing now, and the strange numbness had changed to a sharp pain. Unconsciously he put his hand to his head, and when he carried it away, it was wet. The throbbing in his head grew louder till it was like the roar of an oncoming earthquake. A mist floated before his eyes, and he fell face downward across the dead branch before him. Clutching it eagerly with both hands, he lay still. To his disordered brain, he was a child again in the church at San Juan; and the piece of dead wood in his hands was the standard of the processional cross. *Madre de Dios!* How loud was the noise of the earthquake now, and how terrible the pain in his head! A piece of falling masonry must have struck him—he could not remember. Feebly he lifted his head; and to him the glint of the white moon on the polished leaves of the orange trees was the light of candles burning on the high altar in the sanctuary.

"Padre—Padre Vicente," whispered Miguel brokenly.

But there was no answer. Then the terrible roar of the earthquake grew louder, and the lights on the altar went out.



When Miguel next opened his eyes, he found himself in bed in a cool, whitewashed room. Long bars of yellow sunlight lay across the floor, and through the open windows drifted the heavily sweet odor of orange blossoms. With the fragrance of the flowers came the sleepy twitter of linnets. It was the hour of sunset.

Miguel stirred faintly, and someone moved in the room. Something cool was laid across his forehead; and a voice whispered: "Sleep—go back to sleep." His eyes closed; and soon the scent of orange flowers and the twitter of linnets mingled in his dreams.

## CHAPTER XII.

### Spotted Lilies and White

WHEN, the morning after Miguel's visit at the house of the lone poplar, Doña Epifanía thought that she would like an orange before breakfast, she looked for her niece to gather it. But Rafaela was nowhere to be found. No doubt she had gone on one of those early morning rides on that precious, white horse of her's. Very well, Doña Epifanía would pluck her own orange. For, among all the horde of servants that swarmed in the courtyard, there was not one to whom she would entrust the delicate task of selecting an orange for her to eat. Rafaela now, though far from perfect in many ways, possessed keen discrimination in the matter of oranges. It was like her to run off just when she was needed. Grumbling to herself, Doña Epifanía stepped out of her front door and made her way around the house toward the orange hedge. Stout, dignified, and black gowned, the Doña was a typical Spanish Californian lady of the Mission days. Though she was nearly sixty years old, her olive skin was not



deeply wrinkled, nor were her black eyes dimmed. A crown of smooth, gray hair surmounted a face that had been handsome once, and was striking yet.

In her day Doña Epifanía had been famed for her beauty all up and down the California coast; and when she married Lugarde Montijo, it was considered a splendid match. Epifanía Bonafacio was young, handsome and wealthy; Lugarde Montijo was middle aged, and possessed of a fair amount of good looks and an immense amount of money. Both were of the proud Castilian blood. Don Lugarde was nearly eighty now, a helpless old man; while at sixty, the Doña was still the able-bodied and active mistress of her house and lands.

This morning, as Doña Epifanía walked around the house after her orange, it was characteristic of her that, though she walked with a quick step, she noted several things that required attention along the way. The rose on the south wall needed pruning, and the weeds were coming up among the holly-hocks at the end of the veranda. She would speak to José about those. And the bed of marigolds across the path needed water—they had been shamefully neglected. When she came to the hedge of oranges, she observed that all the fruit from the side facing the house had been

gathered. Accordingly she walked through an opening to the other side. Holding up her skirt with one hand, she picked her way daintily through the dewy wheat, when suddenly she noticed a spot a little way from the hedge where something had crushed the growing grain. Had the dogs been spoiling the wheat again? Indignantly Doña Epifanía made her way thither. But it was no dog that had crushed the grain this time.

It was characteristic of Doña Epifanía that she neither screamed nor fainted when she came upon a young man apparently dead, face downward in the grain at her feet. Instead, she stooped and turned him over where he lay. He was extremely handsome, and by his appearance a gentleman, she observed. Then she laid her hand over his heart. It still beat, though rather faintly.

Inside of a few minutes, Doña Epifanía had summoned help and had installed the young man in one of the best rooms in her house. The Doña was sometimes accused of being cold and lacking in sympathy; but she could never be said to fail in generosity or hospitality. At her hands the poorest wayfarer always received food, clothing and shelter according to his need. If after this he asked her sympathy also, and in so doing came against a blank



wall, it was none of her fault. She had given him all that she had to give—what more could she do?

Miguel however, when Doña Epifanía came upon him in the wheat-field, was in more direct need of someone to bind up his wounds than of anyone to shower kind words upon him. The good lady was therefore in her element; and in the space of a remarkably short time everything that could possibly be done for his welfare had been accomplished.

When, a few moments later, Rafaela appeared on the scene, and seeing the unfortunate young man, apprised her aunt of the fact that he was a friend of the San Juan padre, and a prospective priest himself, Doña Epifanía redoubled her efforts in his behalf. The Doña was a very religious woman, and her respect and veneration for the priesthood were marvelous. One of her two sons, who had died in infancy, she had destined for the Church had he lived; and who shall say that, at sight of this wounded young man almost a priest, a tender chord in her seemingly hard nature was not struck? At any rate the Doña took it upon herself to care for Miguel with her own hands; and if he had been a king, he would have received no better attention from her.

As for Rafaela, she kept her thoughts on the subject to herself. Had it not been for the finding of Miguel in the wheat-field, Doña Epifanía would never have heard of the return of the picture that Antonio had carried, and all that it entailed. Since she had come to live with her aunt after the death of her father in the City of Mexico early that spring, Rafaela had learned to expect no sympathy from her. In matters of food, dress, or anything of that sort, Rafaela had found her slightest wish anticipated, but otherwise she came to look for nothing. It was natural, therefore, that she should grow to keep her thoughts to herself.

But the presence of Miguel in the wheat-field demanded explanation, and that explanation lay in the power of Rafaela to give. Doña Epifanía had not been at home during the visit of Miguel the day before; and the story of his coming required some information as to his errand. The Doña said nothing at the story of Antonio and the picture. But when her niece suggested that it might be kind to send word to the San Juan padre of the misfortune that had befallen the young man, she scoffed.

"I shall not allow the good padre to be worried needlessly," she declared with righte-



ous determination. "The boy will be up and away on his journey in a few weeks, and the good padre need be none the wiser until afterwards."

From Miguel's conversation the day before, Rafaela had inferred that the young man and Padre Vicente loved each other deeply. If she were in the padre's place, thought Rafaela, she would want to know if anything had happened to Miguel. But Doña Epifanía decreed otherwise, and Rafaela did not press her point. It was wiser to refrain.

A week passed, and under the skilful ministrations of Doña Epifanía, Miguel was much improved. The wound in his head, though painful, had not proved serious; but his leg had been badly sprained and took longer to recover. As the young man grew better, he required less attention in one way and more in another. As long as he had needed wet bandages on his head and hot cloths on his leg, the Doña was ready to anticipate his slightest want. But now that all he wished to do was to sit in a big chair on the veranda and be amused, she began to lose her interest. She had too much to do to waste her time in amusing any man—even if he were a prospective priest. If he had been an archbishop, or the Pope himself, it would have made no

difference. Doña Epifanía would have made sure that he was comfortably placed; that he was neither hungry nor thirsty; and then her personal attentions would have ceased, as they did with Miguel.

As for that young man, he was content enough to be left to the tender mercies of Rafaela. Day by day he sat on the veranda with her and his breviary his sole companions. She was one of those rare souls who know when to speak and when to be silent; and Miguel found her presence sweet and gracious. Little by little she learned the story of his miraculous rescue from the waves; his life at San Juan; the terrible earthquake; his dedication to the priesthood; but above all, the love of Padre Vicente.

"How you must love him!" she said gently as they sat on the veranda one morning; he with his fingers in his open breviary, she busy with her needle.

"Yes," answered Miguel. "He is father and mother both to me. Sometimes I think I love him more than I could have loved both."

"A love passing the love of woman," quoted Rafaela softly.

Miguel looked at her gratefully. How she understood!

"It is like that," he said slowly.



"I think I never loved anyone so much," went on Rafaela after a moment, "except my mother, and she died when I was very little, only ten years old. They say I am like her," she added thoughtfully.

"She must have been very beautiful," replied Miguel. Then he realized what he had said. He had not meant to say it, and shamefacedly he looked at Rafaela to see what effect his words had had. But she did not appear to have noticed the connection.

"She was wonderful," she said dreamily, and for a moment her work fell unheeded in her lap. "I thought that she was as beautiful as the angels; and when she died, I am afraid I prayed to her almost as much as I did the Virgin! Do you think that was wrong?"

"No," said Miguel.

"The priest who confessed me said that it was. Perhaps he was mistaken. Anyhow I did not think it was wrong when I did it."

"It was not wrong," repeated Miguel.

"I am glad you do not think it was wrong," she said simply.

They were both silent for awhile. Then Rafaela spoke again.

"If my mother had lived, I think I should never have promised to marry Antonio. But my father wanted me to marry him, and I

knew no better—I was only sixteen.” She smiled a bit absently. “He was twenty-six then, handsome and dashing—as he was when you knew him.”

Miguel nodded reminiscently.

“I thought I loved him,” she continued regretfully. “I was a child—how should I know that it was only a fancy?”

“She would have known—your mother,” said Miguel quietly. How should he know anything of a mother, he who had lived from babyhood in a monastery? Yet, in some mysterious way he did seem to know.

“For a while I went on thinking I loved him,” said Rafaela slowly. “Then I found that I did not love him—and that I never could.” She paused, as if reluctant to finish the story she had begun; but a look into Miguel’s black velvet eyes reassured her. They said: “Tell me; I will understand.”

“It was like this,” she said. “My mother died on Easter Sunday, the year I was ten years old. The year I was seventeen, the thought came to me to offer a lily to her memory on Easter Day. So I took the bulb and cared for it myself.” She paused, and Miguel leaned forward in his chair.

“And it bloomed in time?” he queried eagerly.



"Yes," answered Rafaela in a low tone, "it bloomed in time." Something in her voice was strangely uncertain, and for a moment she looked across the fields to the south. When her eyes met his again, they were perilously near to tears.

"It happened only three years ago this spring," she said as if explaining something. "My mother's lily bloomed, beautiful and pure and white like her own soul. I was very happy over it. I would take it to church on Easter morning, and afterward I would put in on my mother's grave."

Suddenly she turned to Miguel.

"I am telling you this," she said impulsively, "because you will understand. Some people would think I was foolish."

"I shall understand," he said gravely.

"The lily meant a great deal to me," said the girl evenly, "because it was pure and spotless—a fit offering to her memory; and because I had cared for it myself. It was mine to give. But the night of the Friday before Easter, something terrible happened. The lily was growing in a jar in the courtyard, and that night the dogs got to fighting and knocked it over. They broke it in pieces—my beautiful lily was ruined." Rafaela hesitated, but a

glance at Miguel assured her of a sympathy that was not to be doubted.

"I was heartbroken," she went on. "It was not that mine was the only lily. There were plenty of flowers in our garden, and the flower market was full of them. My father would have bought me a sheaf of lilies, but I would have none of them. I had not watched over those and cared for them as I had mine. And then—" her voice shook a little, but she steadied it—"then, the day after my lily was killed, Antonio came in and found me crying. He tried to comfort me, but he did not understand. Poor Antonio—he really loved me," she said pathetically. "He did not understand. He went out to find me another lily. It was late, and there were no more white lilies in the flower market. But there were yellow ones with dark, reddish spots—tiger lilies. To Antonio a lily was a lily. Perhaps he did not even remember that mine had been white. He brought me the spotted lily."

Miguel looked at her in horror.

"He brought you the spotted lily!" he echoed.

"Yes," said Rafaela evenly. "He did not think that the color would make any difference to me—that was what he said. But—to carry that yellow lily to church in place of my pure,



white one; to put the spotted flower on my mother's grave—I could not—no, I could not do it! Then I knew that I had never loved Antonio—and that I could never love him. He said that I would learn to care for him, so things went on as before. But I never did, though I tried very hard; for I felt kindly toward him. He loved me very much. But he did not understand. The lily was not the only thing—it was the same with everything else. He could not understand me; I could not love him. We were a sorry misfit," she finished sadly, "yet he truly loved me. He meant to be good to me—poor Antonio."

For a moment neither spoke. Across the pages of Miguel's breviary they looked at each other. She thought: "You would have understood." He thought: "I should have known. I could never have brought you the spotted lily."

Suddenly Rafaela's face grew hot, and she looked away. Seeing this, Miguel felt self-conscious in her presence for the first time. Perhaps each guessed the other's thought—who knows?

Then the door opened, and old Rosa appeared, bearing Miguel's noon meal on a tray. Her coming relieved the situation; but Rafaela did not speak of the lily again that morning.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### The Hem of Her Garment

**I**N the house of the lone poplar the days went by swiftly. May passed into June, and the coming of summer touched all the hills with brown. On the long veranda Miguel still sat and listened to the linnets in the hedge of oranges, and the noise of horses' feet on the King's Highway. In a few days he would set out again on his journey into Mexico, and Rafaela would be left behind.

Somehow, thought Miguel, they had never been quite the same since the morning when she had told him the story of the lily. That had been a crucial moment for both of them. She knew that he was a man fit for love and war, but he had been dedicated to the priesthood. He knew that she was a woman born to be loved, but he might not tell her so. Subtly enough, these things, known before, were written more largely on the horizon of both man and woman after the story of the lily. Words spoken now held a strange meaning; and each read the other's actions in a different light. And in the days that followed, they



found the fruit of the tree of knowledge both bitter and sweet.

Long before the day came for his departure, Miguel knew that he loved her. The knowledge had not come to him suddenly; he had grown into it slowly, and his conviction was therefore the more sure. And now that he was about to leave her, he knew that his love had begun when he had first caught sight of her under the palm trees at San Diego. Again and again he saw her as she had looked then—slim and straight in her saddle, the gold of the sun in her hair. The embers of Old Desire smouldered no longer; they had flamed into hot fire, and in his soul Miguel knew that many waters could not quench it. For the first time in his life the call of the King's Highway was made plain to him. No longer was it vague and far off, for Rafaela was present with him. She it was who had called him long ago when, as a child, he had stood in the broad trail of the King's Highway below San Juan Capistrano and gazed hungrily into the distance. Though he had not known, and she had not known, it was so. He pictured her as she must have looked then—a little girl in a soft, white dress with the sun in her hair, playing in the courtyard garden of a

house in the City of Mexico. Then he imagined her lonely and forsaken in the great house when her mother had died. For, though Rafaela had not said it, Miguel knew that her father had been one of those who did not understand. Over the coming of Antonio Terrazzas, Miguel did not linger very long; but tenderly he thought of Rafaela as, a lily herself for purity and beauty, she had wanted to offer a spotless flower to the memory of her mother. Then he burned with indignation at Antonio's stupid blunder. Miguel could never have done such a thing—he would have understood; he loved her more than Antonio ever knew how to love. But he might not tell her so.

An inexpressible pain surged over him as he pondered this. She was his by right—she had been made for him; yet he might not take her for his own. The knowledge was at once sweet and bitter. How he loved her, everything about her—the gold of her dark hair where the aureole of the sun lay across it, the deep pools of her clear eyes, the rich tones of her wonderful voice! He would gladly have laid down his very life for her, yet he might not tell her so! Many times in those last days on the veranda, his soul cried out for him to rise and take her in his arms. If



Rafaela happened to glance his way then, she was frightened at the desire in his eyes. But neither of them ever spoke.

The young man was fighting a hard fight. It has been said that love is blind, but strangely enough, Miguel saw now with a clearer vision than before. He loved Rafaela, but something else held him back. That something else was not the Church; it never had been. He realized now what he had forgotten years ago—the true reason why the battle went as it did when Padre Vicente knelt by his bed one moonlight July night at San Juan. The conflict that raged within him now was not one between love and duty. Miguel was torn between love and loyalty to another love, and the struggle was far harder than the other could have been. He had never been a priest at heart, but he loved Padre Vicente. He loved Rafaela too, madly, passionately; yet his loyalty to the priest stood firm. And, being the man that he was, Miguel suffered intensely. As a boy browsing in the Mission library at San Juan, he had once come across the world-old question of the immovable object in the path of the irresistible force. He had carried the puzzle, as he carried all his questions, to Padre Vicente. The padre had laughed and told the little boy to try it and

see. But, not being able to find either the irresistible force or the immovable object, Miguel had been as much in the dark as ever. The padre said that perhaps he would when he grew up. Perhaps he would.

It was the eve of Miguel's departure from the house of the lone poplar, and for the last time he sat with Rafaela on the long veranda. From the hedge of oranges came the evensong of the linnets—it was the hour of sunset. For a long time neither had spoken. Then Miguel looked up from the rose in his hands.

"I saw your aunt this afternoon," he said, "and I told her that I could never thank her enough for all that she has done for me. The Señora Montijo is very kind. The saints will bless her."

"Yes," answered Rafaela without enthusiasm.

"And you too, señorita," went on Miguel earnestly. "You have done even more than the señora. I shall never forget your heavenly kindness to me."

"Do not speak of it," returned Rafaela almost coldly. "It is nothing."

"Nothing!" repeated Miguel warmly. "Nothing! You would not say that, señorita, if you knew what you have been to me! Indeed



you would not say it!" Suddenly he stopped. He had not meant to say so much.

She looked up, her clear direct gaze quite unruffled.

"You should not speak of it—it has been a pleasure to me," she said in a matter of fact way. "You have more than repaid anything that I could do. You have understood."

Miguel wondered if she knew what her words meant to him. For a moment he lost himself.

"Then—then you will not forget me?" he asked eagerly.

"Forget you?" she echoed slowly. "No, I shall not forget you."

Her words were simple, but to Miguel was carried the conviction that she meant more than she said. For a moment something welled up in his throat and he could not speak. He dared not look up, and as for her, she said nothing. He wondered what she thought.

Suddenly old Don Lugarde, leaning on his stick, shuffled around the corner of the house and disappeared through the hedge of oranges. At the sound of his footsteps Miguel started almost guiltily. When he looked up, he saw that Rafaela was trembling. She rose and walked toward the door. Then she paused an instant.

"You will pardon me if I go into the house," she said rather uncertainly. "My aunt may have something for me to do." Then she disappeared through the door, and Miguel was left alone.

That night he could not sleep. Through his open window drifted the long, white glory of the summer moon, and with it the mingled odors of a thousand flowers. Miguel wondered if Rafaela slept. Would she think of him—dream of him, perhaps, on this last night that he lay under her roof? He tried to put the thought from him as unseemly for a man in his situation, but it would not leave his mind. He had not spoken, nor had she; but he believed that she cared. He remembered that he had counted Terrazzas happier asleep under the spring grasses than alive and knowing that Rafaela did not love him. But to love her, to be loved again, and yet be forced to go away and leave her—was not that a thing infinitely more hard to bear?

For he must go away and leave her. No matter how much he loved her, no matter how eagerly his thought followed her, he always came back to that. It is not easy to forget the saint one has loved and adored for twenty years, especially if that saint is alive and walking the earth. Incidentally, a saint who



has not tumbled off his pedestal after twenty years of familiar intercourse with his adorer, must be worthy the name.

No, though he would gladly give his life for her, she could never be his. Loyalty to a man, not to the Church, held him back. He knew that now, and since he had taken no vows as yet, he counted it no sin to think of her.

Reverently he pictured to himself what life would be if she were only his—how he would love her—what he would not do for her! And such a home as they would have together—a home such as he had dreamed of but never known. He saw her beside the chimney with him on winter evenings—how the warm fire-light would play over the glory of her hair and eyes! But it were better not to think of it, since it could never be. He would always be alone—a somber priest offering up endless prayers before an altar that had never kindled in his breast the holy fervor that burned in Padre Vicente's. He had never been meant for a priest, but Fate had contrived to make him one. He was a man however, and he would play the game!

With the thought of Padre Vicente came for the first time the wonder if the priest had ever passed through such a struggle as this.

Miguel remembered the story of the pearl told in the garden of San Juan so long ago.

"He gave up everything—home—friends—the hope of joys that might be his in time to come," the priest had said.

As Miguel had grown older, he guessed that the man in the story had been Padre Vicente. What would he have done at a time like this?

Rising from his bed, Miguel walked over to the open window and knelt before it. Through the opening in the hedge of oranges he could see the wheat-field still and white under the moon. There where the shadowy trail of the King's Highway stretched into the distance, the lone poplar towered like a giant monk in the dimness. Somewhere in the oaks in the south of the wheat-field a mocking bird was singing to his mate. Miguel's head went down upon the window sill, and the prayer that went up from his stormy heart was not one found in the breviary. Certain it was, however, that he had never prayed so earnestly before.

A soft breeze from the hills touched Miguel's hot cheek gently; and after a time, wearied out, he fell asleep, his head pillowed on the stone window ledge. For a long time he did not stir, and when the pale light of coming



day began to show above the eastern hills, he dreamed.

In the dream Rafaela was walking by his side in the padres' garden at San Juan Capistrano. Miguel thought that she was his at last, and his joy was unspeakable. A fair, white lily grew beside the path, and he stooped to gather it for her. But just as he was about to place the flower in her hand, the door leading from the garden into the sacristy opened, and Miguel saw Padre Vicente. A look of terrible agony marked the priest's features, and silently he beckoned to Miguel to come. But there was Rafaela—how could he leave her alone? Still Padre Vicente stood in the doorway, his pleading eyes fixed on the young man's face. But Miguel did not go. A cold wave of terror swept over him, and he stood as if in a trance, unable to move or cry out. Then, before his eyes, Padre Vicente disappeared slowly, as if he had been a vision or a ghost. But the young man did not move.

Suddenly he awoke with a cry. A cold sweat broke from his forehead and he trembled violently. In the east the rosy flush of day lay over the hills. Miguel struggled to his feet and began to dress hurriedly. His cramped position at the window had left him stiff and sore, and a strange, dizzy feeling was in his

head. He wanted to get outdoors—he wanted to get away from the place where the dream had come to him.

Wearily Miguel went out into the rosy dawn. He had spent an almost sleepless night, and his eyes were heavy. The morning song of the linnets in the hedge of oranges met no answer in his heart. Would that the day were over and evening come again, he thought bitterly, since in living there was no joy at all! Scarcely knowing why he did so, he wandered aimlessly around the corner of the house.

Then he stopped, his heart beating wildly. There in the shadow of the oranges stood Rafaela, her rosary in her hands. She did not see him. Her face was lifted to the morning sky, and Miguel saw that she had been weeping. All the young life in him leapt up at sight of her, and unconsciously he started forward. A wild, unreasoning joy such as he felt when he set out on the King's Highway, clutched at his heart. He forgot that he must leave Rafaela that day, forgot that back in San Juan waited Padre Vicente; knew only that she had been weeping and that he loved her. Old Desire rose up in his soul, and the flame of it burned him cruelly. He would take her in his arms and crush her to him—if only for



one moment, she would be his! He loved her—nothing in heaven or earth could ever separate him from the love of her!

Then, as he started forward, all the fire of his soul in his eyes, she turned and saw him. Her face wore a strange exaltation, and again she was like the angel in the church at San Juan. Miguel stopped. It would have been like laying unholy hands upon a saint to have touched her then. The aureole of the sun lay across her head, and reverently he knelt at her feet.

"Rafaela!" he whispered, and, lifting the hem of her garment, he kissed it passionately.

For an instant she stood looking down at him. Tremblingly, she laid her hand upon his hair.

"Miguel!" she answered softly, and there was a world of tenderness in her voice. Then, as if frightened at what she had done, she fled.



Later that morning Miguel was riding southward on the King's Highway. In the field to the right a meadow lark bubbled over with joy, and overhead the sun was shining in a turquoise sky; but Miguel neither saw nor heard. No longer did he carry the picture of Rafaela over his heart. It was graven in his soul.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### The Shadow of the Cross

**I**N the valley of peace summer had come and gone. Across the groves and vineyards drifted the clear, gold haze of autumn; and down from the blue of heaven floated the far cry of the cranes winging their way southward for the winter. The harvest was nearly over, and the days of rain were at hand. From cloister and ranchería alike came the din of labor and the hum of voices. San Juan Capistrano was a veritable hive for industry that year. How long it would be before the hand of the spoilers would overturn the hive and scatter its store of sweets was a question that wisest heads were puzzling themselves to answer.

On a stone seat in the shadow of the church wall sat Padre Vicente and his guest, who was none other than the padre presidente Duran himself. Earlier in the afternoon the padre presidente had met the San Juan priests in the consultation room of the Mission, and now he and Padre Vicente lingered talking in the garden.



Duran tapped impatiently with his fingers upon the stone bench.

"I tell you it is no use to do anything at all," he said. "They will not listen to a word from us. Even now they are casting lots for the vesture of the Church, as it were."

Despair was written upon Padre Vicente's every feature. In the shadow of his cowl his face looked old and worn.

"But surely they cannot mean to take away the rightful heritage of the Church—to drive the people out of their homes," he insisted. "I have long known that it was coming—this secularization; but it cannot mean the end of everything."

Duran smiled grimly.

"That is just what it will mean, dear brother," he answered sadly, "when it does come. Just when that may be, no one knows yet certainly. It may be ten years, it may be only one."

"But if parishes are formed, surely the Church cannot lose everything," faltered Padre Vicente.

An expression of bitterness passed across Duran's face.

"You do not know them as I do—these Mexicans," he said. "They will not consider us at all. We are Spaniards of the old school.

Yes, even now they pretend to suspect us of intrigue against the republic! They will rob the Church of everything that She possesses, and then claim that it is done in the name of justice and the welfare of the people they have defrauded!" His voice, calm before, quivered with emotion. "They are thieves and robbers, and their eyes are on the fat of the land. I tell you they will not leave us or our people where to lay our heads!" he went on indignantly. "We shall be among the dispersed, 'being destitute, afflicted,—wandering in deserts and in mountains and in caves and dens of the earth!' You know yourself that they have filched from the Pious Fund till there is a mere pittance left! It would beggar their miserable government to pay back what they have stolen."

He paused for a moment, glancing down at the violets along the garden path. "For a long time I was like you, dear brother," he said sadly. "I refused to believe that our work here was at an end. But now I know that the last days are come. Our beautiful gardens shall be a plowed field. The spoilers will take the tiles from our cloisters to roof their pig sties. They will tear down the sacred stones of our churches to build their houses. Our people, the sheep of our pasture, they will scatter and



defraud and kill!" He opened his lips to say more, but, seeing the look in the other's eyes, stopped short.

"But the Church," cried Padre Vicente in a voice of agony, "is there no appeal to Her?"

"To the Church?" echoed Duran, "no, brother. The axe is already laid at the root of the tree. The Church can do nothing."

"Then there is no hope to save anything—our labor is at an end." Padre Vicente spoke as if to himself.

"The will of the good God is not always easy to understand," said Duran, after a moment. "We can do nothing but yield."

He rose and stood looking down at the huddled figure of Padre Vicente on the stone seat.

"No, we can do nothing but yield," he repeated, after a moment. "Our people will be like the martyrs of the early Church. They shall all have their reward."

Padre Vicente turned burning eyes to the face of the man in the path.

"May the good God have mercy upon our people," he said, solemnly, "for they are not of the stuff that martyrs are made of! They are the veriest children—they are not strong men—except a few. In the hands of their spoilers they will be as dead leaves in a winter wind!" He paused as if the words choked him, then

hurried on, his voice shaking. "They could not escape destruction if they would!"

With a stifled sob, Padre Vicente's head went down on his knees. Gently Duran laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

"Courage, dear brother, courage," he whispered.

Padre Vicente lifted his head. His eyes were dry.

"God knows that I would give my life for them!" he said.

"He knows," repeated Duran simply.

When Padre Vicente looked up again his companion had gone. In the square-paved path, where the padre presidente had stood, lay a dark shadow cast by the great cross on the belfried wall to the west of the garden. For a moment the man on the bench gazed at the shadow, silent, fascinated. A look of awe crept into his eyes, and he lifted them to the blue of heaven.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," quoted the priest reverently.

Then he rose and followed Duran into the cloister.

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Harvest days were over, and from the south came the rains, folding sleepy San Juan valley in their soft, gray embrace. The mottled syc-



mores had cast their leaves in yellow drifts at their feet, and over all the hills crept a faint shimmer of green. Winter had come.

To Padre Vicente, standing in the shelter of the western colonnade, it seemed that harvest days were over forever,—not the harvest of yellow wheat and ripe olives and purple grapes; but the harvest of souls, where he had labored so long. The soft noise of the rain-water as it sang its way through the red tile spouts at the edge of the roof said only one thing to him. Forever—forever—forever. The harvest was over forever. Somewhere down there in the rain at the Mission gate the King's Highway ran past—southward to San Luis Rey and San Diego; northward to San Gabriel and Santa Barbara, and all the rest of the wonderful chain of Franciscan Missions. Years ago, soldiers and friars of Spain had taken possession of the land in the name of the King of Spain and of the Holy Church of God. To every loyal Franciscan then, the appellation: "The King's Highway" had carried a double meaning. The name referred to the reigning monarch of Castile—yes; but above all, to that great King of kings and Lord of lords, whose footstool was the earth, and whose throne was in the heavens. All claims of the King of Spain to territory in the Californias

was wiped out now by the Mexican revolution. Had that other King forsaken His heritage, too? Padre Vicente could not believe that He had, yet His will was not easy to understand. Why should the good God permit the spoilure of His Holy Church and the scattering of the sheep of His pasture? Padre Vicente did not know. Was it because His servants, the Mission fathers, had not been faithful to their trust? Honestly, Padre Vicente searched his own heart, and knew that he had fought a good fight. It was his belief that his brothers had done the same. He knew that in the days of the early Church God had allowed His people to suffer persecution; that it had been in accord with the divine will. Was the coming upheaval here in accord with that will, too? Why had the God of all the earth allowed a splendid host of churches to be built all the way from San Diego to San Rafael, only to let them fall into the hands of greedy men, whose god was gold? Padre Vicente's eyes searched the gray heavens in vain. There was no answer. Only the softly falling rain sang in the spouts at the edge of the roof—forever—forever—forever. The harvest was over forever.

Slowly Padre Vicente paced the length of the colonnade, his eyes bent upon the square tiles of the floor. Why had God required of



him the best years of his life, if everything was to be a pitiful failure at the last? While it is effective, sacrifice is sweet, but in a needless renunciation there is no joy. As the priest walked, his head sank upon his breast. His eyes were half closed, but he saw far beyond the square tiles of the floor—looked almost fearfully into a realm he had turned his back resolutely upon for years. It was the Land of What Might Have Been.

In every life into which stress comes, there is a Land of What Might Have Been. For years Padre Vicente had looked backward but seldom, and never with lasting regret. The present joy in the passion of service had blotted out all else. But now, in the face of the coming wreck of all that he had loved and labored for, who shall say that Padre Vicente was the less a saint because the past came back to him insistently?

Because of his greater opportunities, Evaristo de Dios Artillaga had renounced more than most men do in taking holy orders. He had sacrificed much; but his joy had been great because to him the glory of God counted more than the glory of the world. But now, amid the threatened ruin of the fabric into which he had woven the strands of his life,

the phantom of What Might Have Been beckoned to him mockingly.

If he had never heard the call of the Church, or, if hearing, had turned a deaf ear, how different his life would have been! Possessed of great personality and great wealth, he could probably have attained his highest ambition. Nothing would have been denied him; material welfare, home, friends, love—all might have been his. Love—there had been Rafaela—Rafaela who loved him, whom he loved. Had it been worth while, his renunciation of her? Had her life been happy afterward? How he had loved her! As if it had been yesterday, Padre Vicente remembered his anguish the last time he had looked upon her face. They had said nothing to each other. He was walking in the processional in the cathedral, a young priest just ordained. She was kneeling in the congregation, slim and straight, like a young angel in her white gown. Only for an instant her clear, high gaze met his as the procession passed by; but that instant was with him yet, thirty years after. The sacrifice had been terrible. Had it been worth while—was it worth while now in the face of the wreck of all that he had sacrificed for? He had offered up his love and her's upon the altar of Holy Church. It is all very well for a man to offer



himself a sacrifice to his zeal, but has he the right to offer the happiness of the woman who loves him also? Had he spoiled Rafaela's life in offering up his own? There was no answer. Only the rain in the tiles sang: Forever—forever—forever. Rafaela was lost to him forever.

Yes, right or wrong, the past was irrevocable now. He had renounced all to serve Holy Church in New Spain, and the forces of Holy Church in New Spain were all but routed now. He had builded his life into a tottering wall. When the fall came he would be homeless and friendless, a defeated man. The people whom he had loved better than his own life might appeal to him in vain. He could not protect them from their enemies.

And Miguel, whom he had loved also—Miguel was even now in Mexico on a fruitless quest. Padre Vicente had thought to graft young life into the old stock of the Mission structure; but the axe was already laid at the root of the tree, and no bud might blossom and bear fruit now; it could only shrivel and die where it was set.

In the gray light of the rainy afternoon, San Juan Capistrano gloomed dull and cheerless. To the tortured eye of the man in the shadow of the colonnade, the walls were already

crumbling to decay, devastated by the pitiless hand of enemies. He saw his beloved garden a plowed field; his orchards neglected and dying; the sacred altar, where he had spent so many hours in prayer robbed of its gold and silver; but, worst of all, his people, the sheep of his pasture, a prey to the lusts of greedy men. It must not be—it could not be—the good God would not let it be! Yet Padre Vicente knew that it would be. For years he had steadily refused to see the ruin that stared him in the face. He could not choose but see it now.

Before the coming of Duran a week ago, Padre Vicente had walked with a spring in his step. He had held himself straight, and the fire of youth had gleamed yet in his dark eyes. At fifty-seven he had been still a young man. Gently Duran had forced upon the priest the realization he had refused to face for years, and the knowledge had left him a changed man. Bravely he had hoped against hope for years; and now that the last hope was gone, the spring dropped out of his step, the straight lines of his shoulders began to sag, and the fire slowly died from his eyes. At fifty-seven Padre Vicente was already an old man.

Was the seeming defeat of God's Kingdom in accord with His will? Did He know that



the heart of His servant was broken? Careless of the cold rain that wet his shoulders under the coarse, brown robe, Padre Vicente sank to his knees in one of the corridor arches. How long he prayed he did not know, but when he rose to his feet, the Angelus was ringing. Cold and wet, with a dull ache in his body from kneeling so long in the rain, Padre Vicente hurried into the cloister.

That night the priest knelt until midnight on the cold steps of the altar in the sanctuary. The church was dark, and he could not see the face of the Christ on the altar above him. But he knew that it was there; and in that hour it brought him comfort, though the only prayer that came to his lips was the petition voiced in that same place years before, when all seemed dark:

"O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine heritage,

Govern them and lift them up forever!"

Then an overwhelming weariness, such as he had never known, crept over him, and rising from his cramped position on the cold stones, he made his way to his cell. His shoulders were still damp from the rain, and his head felt strangely dull and heavy. Lying on his hard, narrow bed, he fell into a restless sleep. Outside, the rain in the tiles sang drearily and

mingled with his dreams: Forever—forever—forever. The harvest was over forever.



A week later, the clouds had gone, and everywhere the sun was shining on the clean red of tiles and the polished, dark green of oranges. Swallows twittered in the eaves, and through all the cloister went the din of happy labor.

That afternoon Padre Vicente rose from the bed where he had lain for a week, and walked unsteadily down the courtyard colonnade. For fifty-seven years and more, he had known nothing but perfect health; and the fact that he felt somewhat weak and uncertain now, annoyed him vaguely. At sight of the joy that greeted him in all the dark faces along the corridor, Padre Vicente smiled faintly. They were the faces of his people, and he loved them. At the south end of the corridor the priest came upon old Pablo leaning upon his stick. Joy leapt up in the wrinkled, mahogany face of the old man.

"May all the saints be praised!" cried Pablo, "for the good padre is well once more!"

The adoring eyes that he fixed upon the padre's face were dim and of a bluish cast, like those of an aged dog. Pablo was very old and feeble.



"Blessed is he whom the Lord shall take away from the wrath to come." Like a word of prophecy the sentence rang in the ears of Padre Vicente.

"The good God has blessed you, Pablo," said the priest gently. "May His peace be ever with you." Tenderly he placed his hand upon the old man's head in a gesture of blessing, and silently passed on.

At the door that led into the padre's garden, he paused a moment, then went in. All along the path purple violets peered from underneath the green of their leaves; and from the great oleander, east of the Church, came the hopeful chirp of linnets. No longer did the rain sing drearily in the tiles. Everything was alive and rejoicing: the glorious sun, the springing flowers, and the birds twittering among the leaves. Sunlight lay across the garden, joyous, yellow sunlight that sparkled on every rain-washed leaf and gleamed on every satin petal. Yet, with sunlight came shadows, too; for there upon the tiled path at the feet of Padre Vicente lay the shadow of the cross on the bell-fried wall—long and dark and straight—the shadow of the cross.

The priest saw the shadow, and a strange look crept into his face. Silently he knelt and

kissed the place where the shadow lay. When he rose his eyes were triumphant.

Dark and long and straight, the shadow of the cross still lay along the path, growing longer and darker as the sun sank lower in the west. Involuntarily the priest bowed his head.

"Behold the servant of the Lord—be it unto me according to Thy word," whispered Padre Vicente.



## CHAPTER XV

### Holy Orders

OVER the City of Mexico brooded the eternal silences of the stars. Before the little window of a cell in the cloister of San Fernando sat a young man in the somber habit of a monk. Eagerly he pressed his hot cheek against the grating of the window. The far, white stars that gleamed yonder were the same that shone over Capistrano, and the house of the lone poplar at San Diego. Was Rafaela watching the stars now? Feverishly the young man bent his head, and kneeling, tried to pray that the saints would keep the beautiful Rafaela Montijo. But his petitions brought him no comfort.

For Miguel was very unhappy. Day after day he followed the wearisome round of prayers and tasks, but his heart was not in them. When he tried to read his breviary, the clear, frank eyes of Rafaela came between his and the printed page. She looked at him from the faces of frescoed angels, from the eyes of saints over the altar. Wherever he went, he saw her as she had looked that last morning in the garden when he had kissed the hem of her gar-

ment. He had spoken but one word to her: "Rafaela!" She had understood, and she had told him so in the one word that was her answer: "Miguel!" What a depth of tenderness she had put into the exquisite inflection of that one word! She had gone away suddenly then, without saying anything more; but he knew that she loved him. He could not have been more sure of it if she had spoken ten thousand impassioned syllables. That one word was enough; he knew.

In passionate memory he pressed the hem of her garment to his lips once more, and the scent of withered rose petals that had clung about her filled his nostrils, almost suffocating him with its sweetness.

"Rafaela!" he whispered brokenly.

A wave of agonized yearning surged over him, and he laid his head upon the stone window ledge.

"Dios mío—Dios mío!" he repeated helplessly. His whole frame trembled, and when he rose, beads of sweat stood on his brow.

He crossed the room, then came back to the window. After all, had he done right in leaving Rafaela and coming to Mexico, all because of a promise given to Padre Vicente by a boy too young to choose for himself? Miguel knew that she loved him. Had it been right to



leave her among those who neither understood nor loved her—to sacrifice two lives on the altar of a promise? And was it entirely right to Padre Vicente to hide from him the fact that Miguel could never render to the Church more than a half-hearted service?

For nearly six months Miguel had been in the cloister of San Fernando, and every day the weary round of prayers and pious exercises had grown more irksome to him. He had never been born for book and cassock and bell. The blood that beat in his pulses might have flowed in the veins of generations of fighting men—men who dared much in love and war; it was hot enough, and it throbbed wildly enough. At any rate, it was not the sort of blood that ought to flow in the veins of a man who wore the garb of a priest. A priest should not strike a man across the face with his riding whip. A priest should not fall madly in love with a beautiful girl. He should not sit and dream of her when he tells his beads. But Miguel was not a priest at heart, though he wore the habit, and had entered upon his novitiate. He shrank from the thought of the final vows. Could he ever bring himself to take them? The young man did not know.

For surcease of sorrow seemed as far off as it had on the day of his departure from the

house of the lone poplar. There was scarcely an hour in the day that the face of Rafaela, with the aureole of the sun above it, did not float before his eyes. He only slept to dream of her. A man of less strength than his would have broken away from the cloister long ago; perhaps he would never have reached it in the first place. Indeed, there had been times since his arrival when Miguel had all but abandoned everything to answer the silent call of the woman he loved. But loyalty to Padre Vicente had held him back.

Days passed, and a new side of the question came to light. As Miguel became initiated into the sacred mysteries of the priesthood, he believed that he saw with more of the vision of Padre Vicente. Was it right to enter holy orders when he could not give his whole heart to the service of Holy Church? For Miguel knew that he could never make a whole-souled priest—he had no vocation. Even if he had not loved Rafaela, he would still have had no vocation. Years ago, in Old Spain, when Evaristo Artillaga had entered holy orders, he had set aside a love as strong, if not stronger than the love of Miguel for Rafaela Montijo. He had done this because of the greater passion that dominated his soul. But with Miguel there was no greater passion



than his love for Rafaela. Ought he to sacrifice all to the loyalty to a promise—a promise lived rather than spoken? If Padre Vicente knew, would he want Miguel to offer up an empty service where no heart was? Knowing the heroic stature of the soul of the priest, Miguel could not, in justice, answer yes. But the answer was hard, for he loved Padre Vicente. He could not go to the priest and say, "I have betrayed your trust, mistaken my calling—broken my promise and your heart." He could not do that. What should he do?

The cold, white stars gave no sign. Perhaps even now they looked into the upturned gaze of the priest of Capistrano—perhaps the clear, dark eyes of Rafaela caught their gleam. For a long time Miguel stood before the window. What should he say to Padre Vicente?

Then, suddenly, without any warning at all, Miguel saw before him the face of Rafaela Montijo. As on that last morning before the hedge of oranges, there were traces of tears on her face—tears that she had shed for him—and the sight of her blotted out all else from his eyes. In his soul, the hot flame of Old Desire, wild, unreasoning and unconquerable, rose up and stifled him with resistless passion. She was his—how could he ever have left her? Stronger than the very breath of life itself,

stronger than any power in heaven above or earth beneath was his love for her. He would go to her—as soon as it was light he would arise and go to her. No longer could the cloister wall separate them. His blood danced madly in his veins, and his nails bit savagely into the palms of his hands. The eternal laws of God said that she was his by right—the God of truth and justice did not require of him what was not his to give, the sacrifice of a whole heart. His whole heart was her's—the good God had given it to her. Miguel had not meant to give it; but nothing could ever take it away from her now. She should have what was her's by right; she should have it speedily. The very next morning, as soon as ever it was light, he would leave the cloister and go to her—to Rafaela Montijo, the well beloved of his soul! At the very thought of her his pulses tingled joyously, and he gripped the iron bar of the window grating as if he would crush it in his fingers. She was all his—all! She loved him; yes, she had even wept for him! Madre de Dios! How her clear, dark eyes would deepen into tender light when she should see him again! Yes, he would surely go to her. He would take her in his arms, as he had not done on that last morning when he had kissed the hem of her garment. He would



tell her that he loved her—that she was his, she, Rafaela of his heart!

Wearied out, Miguel flung himself upon his narrow bed. In a moment he was sleeping as he had not slept since he had come to San Fernando, the dreamless sleep of youth. Silence brooded over the cloister, and outside the stars kept watch.

Early the next morning, with the call to prayer, came a knock at Miguel's door. Wondering, he opened the door. Outside waited a brother with a letter in his hand.

"An urgent message," said the man simply. He put the letter into Miguel's outstretched hand, and went away silently.

At sight of the familiar handwriting on the coarse, grayish white paper, Miguel changed color. With trembling fingers he tore the seal from the letter and devoured its contents anxiously. The last word read, he crushed the paper into his bosom with feverish haste, and hurried out into the corridor.

The call to prayer rang insistently in his ears now, but he did not heed it; neither did he see the questioning faces of the brothers whom he passed in the corridor. In his bosom, the bit of crumpled, grayish paper burned him as if it had been a coal of fire. He must find someone—must tell them that he was going

away—that he must go at once to Padre Vicente. As Miguel hurried along, the rosary at his side slipped and fell to the stone floor with a tinkling noise—the silver rosary with the ivory crucifix that Padre Vicente had given him when he had set out on the King's Highway last spring. He stooped to pick it up. In the dim light of the corridor the ivory crucifix gleamed white, and with a stifled cry, Miguel pressed it to his lips.

“Padre Vicente,” he whispered eagerly, “Padre Vicente, forgive!”



## CHAPTER XVI.

### A Dream of Old Spain

ALL along the yellow shore below San Juan Point, the restless seawater swirled and broke in a thousand shifting lights of sapphire and amethyst and pearl. Shining and cloudless, the great bowl of the sky met in a long line the level plain of the sea. Across the blue of heaven flashed the white of a gull's wing, across the blue of the water the delicate drift of spray; but never the shadow of a sail. It was the first of January, and such a perfect day as can happen only in midwinter on the California coast. From the valley of peace to the southeast, drifted the mellow voices of the bells of San Juan Capistrano. It was the hour before noon, and at the sound of the bells, the Indians at work in the fields would gather at the Mission for their midday meal and siesta.

On the grassy slope of the sea cliff, sat Padre Vicente. All morning he had worked with the Indians among the orange orchards; and, instead of going to the Mission at noon as was his habit, he had chosen to eat his frugal meal of parched corn on the cliff. The

corn disposed of, the priest sat for sometime gazing out over the expanse of sparkling blue. There was something essentially joyous in the way each little wave leapt up to answer the call of the wind; something that pleased Padre Vicente in the glint of the sun on the water. His breviary lay unopened in his lap, for his eyes were busy with that which was written in a book not made with hands—the glory of God's earth.

It was a part of the nature of Padre Vicente that he should love these things. Everything—the shifting play of kaleidoscopic tints in the water before him, the soft touch of the sea air on his face, the fresh, sweet smell of the growing things about him, the velvety feel of the young grass on his sandalled feet, and the red-gold flame of an early poppy at his side—all these things brought him a quiet joy.

Years ago at a time like this, the priest would almost unconsciously have lifted up his voice in the ecstatic words of the *Te Deum*:

“Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory.”

Today, though his appreciation of all the beauty round about was no less keen, his mood was rather that of the more quiet *Nunc Dimittis*:

“Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,



According to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

Padre Vicente did not sing the words. He repeated them softly to himself, and the look of peace in his eyes deepened until it became almost rejoicing.

In the days that had passed since he had knelt to kiss the shadow of the cross in the cloister garden, the peace that passeth understanding had come again to Padre Vicente. The black threat of awful desolation lay written across every sunny sky for him, but beyond the sky was the face of God. For years the priest had labored among the Indians; baptizing, teaching, toiling, confessing, administering the last rites, and burying the dead. Willingly, he would have died for his people; but already he had done more—he had lived for them. The good God had given him strength for all these things, and He would not fail His loyal servant now. In the hour of blackest devastation His Presence would be there.

"Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

As Padre Vicente sat on the cliff that sunny noon, there came back to him the words of assurance that he had spoken to Miguel when Antonio Terrazzas had died nearly a year ago.

"The will of God is never cruel, Miguel," he had said. "He could not be cruel, for He is Love. I have lived a long while and I know." And had he not known? Padre Vicente felt that the words that he had spoken were true.

"We are not always happy, hijo mío," he had said, "Sometimes our dearest hopes, things we would give our life blood for, seem wrecked before our eyes. That is hard—very hard, and we could not understand if this life were all. But this life is not all. I know."

Padre Vicente knew. Heartbreaking ruin might descend upon his people here, but the good God would not forsake them forever.

"We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants  
Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy  
precious blood;  
Make them to be numberéd with Thy saints  
in glory everlasting."

Padre Vicente's eyes glowed with hope invincible. The way was hard, cruel, almost too terrible to conquer; but by the help of God, he would conquer it, he and the people that the Father had given him. The way was dark, but at the end of the journey there would be light.

"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off."



With a look on his face as if he would search the very gate of heaven, Padre Vicente gazed into the blue deeps above; and when a shadow fell across the cover of his breviary, he did not look around at first. Then a soft footstep fell in the grass at his side, and turning, he looked. Peace died in his eyes. He struggled to his feet.

Slim and straight in her riding habit of black, Rafaela Montijo stood on the slope of the cliff and looked down at him. Across the dark veil of her hair sparkled the aureole of the sun, and in her clear, direct eyes he saw the same high look that he had known thirty years ago. Wondering, she came down to where he stood, and gazed steadfastly into his face. Yes, this was surely Padre Vicente. Only Miguel had not told her that his hair was growing white about the temples.

"You are Padre Vicente Artillaga," she said simply. "I am Rafaela Montijo, to whom you sent a letter and a picture last May. I am in trouble, and I have come to you because you are the only person that can help me."

Standing there looking at her, Padre Vicente swayed uncertainly, and put out a hand as if to steady himself. Rafaela saw the motion, and started forward to support him.

"You are not well, padre," she cried anxiously. "I have startled you—let me help—"

"No, my daughter," said the priest quietly. "It is nothing. I am quite well. Sit down on the grass and tell me your trouble." There was an infinite tenderness in his voice, and Rafaela looked at him gratefully.

Together the priest and the girl sat down on the grassy slope. Mingled with the sympathy in the man's eyes was a look of mute suffering that Rafaela could not fathom. She saw that it was there, however, and her heart went out to the man in the coarse, brown robe.

"I knew that you would be like this, padre," she said impulsively, "so beautiful and kind. I was afraid to come at first, but I knew that it was the only thing to do. The good God has led me here, padre."

"May His blessing be upon you, my daughter," said Padre Vicente, and his voice, though tender, was strangely shaken.

"I am visiting friends on a ranch toward San Gabriel, and this morning I rode to Capistrano on my horse." She glanced backward to where a white horse cropped the herbage leisurely. "When I came there, they told me that you were here, and a little Indian called Juanito showed me the way. . . . I think, for you to



understand, I must tell you about my mother first," she went on slowly.

Her mother! Did the girl know that she was the very reincarnation of her mother? Did she know that her mother had been ——? A terrible storm surged within the breast of the priest, so terrible that he could scarcely breathe. Thirty years count a long time in the life of a man, but sometimes thirty years can be as one day. Across the years, Padre Vicente looked into the face of the woman for whom he had known a love that was stronger than death; but the eyes that he fixed upon the face of her daughter gave no sign of the tumult that raged within him.

"Tell me about your mother," he said steadily.

"They say that I am very like her," said Rafaela. "When my mother was a girl in Old Spain, she met a young man who was studying to be a priest. I do not know his name. They loved each other, but they might not marry, because he was destined for the Church. He went away, I do not know where; but I believe that she never left off loving him while she lived. She never told me so, but I believe that that is true."

As long as she lived! The question un-

answered for thirty years trembled on the lips of Padre Vicente, but he held his peace.

"She married my father not very long after," the girl went on, "and came to live in the City of Mexico. But she was never happy. When I was a child, I used to wonder why my mother was sad so often, and seldom laughed. Now I know." Rafaela paused to gather a tiny, yellow field daisy that grew at her feet. "It was because she did not love my father," she said. "She could not love him—they were not alike in anything. What he loved she hated, and what she loved he did not care for. I did not know when I was a child, but I think now that her life must have been very dreary. She died when I was only ten years old, and I thought that the very sun was darkened." Her voice quivered.

Fire that had slept in ashes for years smouldered anew in Padre Vicente's dark eyes. Rafaela, his soul's beloved, had died, not many years ago—the unhappy wife of a man she did not love. Oh, the infinite pity of it! And he had been the cause of it all—if he had not left her for the service of Holy Church, it could never have happened. Madre de Dios! How he, Evaristo Artillaga, would have loved her and cared for her—as the very apple of his eye he would have guarded her! But the past



was gone now. He might look across the years, but he might not change their tale. With his own hand he had placed the woman he loved out of his reach, like a saint in a niche. She had been dead for years now. Her daughter, who might have been his, was with him now. She was in trouble, and she had come to him for help. Tenderly Padre Vicente turned to the girl at his side.

"Tell me about yourself," he said gently.

A suspicion of tears dimmed the clear gaze she lifted to his.

"I will tell you, padre," she said. "When I grew older, I was betrothed to a man I fancied I loved—Antonio Terrazas. You knew him. I never loved him, but that does not matter now, for he is dead. Last spring my father died too, and I came to live with my aunt, Doña Epifaniá Montijo, above San Diego. I was there when you sent me the picture by the hand of Don Miguel Artillaga." She hesitated. "When Don Miguel left the house after bringing the picture, it was growing dark. Someone knocked him down on the road, and dragged him into a field below the house. I never knew how it happened, for he did not tell me. But the next morning my aunt found him lying as if he were dead, under the orange hedge south of the house. She had him brought in,

and nursed him until he was well. I saw a great deal of him then."

Until now, Rafaela's voice had been fairly calm—almost apathetic at times. Suddenly she leaned forward, her whole body tense, her face aflame.

"Padre—" she breathed, "I loved him—he loved me! We never said but one word to each other about it, but we both knew. I shall never stop loving him—I cannot. He can never stop loving me. I know there is no forgetting."

The world-old passion in her eyes clutched wildly at the heart of Padre Vicente. For an instant, the sea and the sky and the woman in the grass beside him whirled madly before his face. With a sudden effort he gained control of his senses.

"He went away, but he loves me still," she was saying. He has said nothing since, but I know that he cannot forget. I have tried to forget, but I cannot. I shall never forget."

Her voice carried conviction to Padre Vicente. No, she would never forget.

"I know now how it was with my mother when she loved the priest," said Rafaela more quietly. "At first I thought I was committing sin in loving Don Miguel, since he was destined for holy orders. But now I know that it



was no sin. Don Miguel was never meant for a priest." Her voice quivered again, and she clasped her hands eagerly, letting fall the little yellow daisy. "Ever since I first saw him, I knew that he was no priest—someone had made a mistake. The good God had meant him for a soldier, a lover, anything but a priest! My mother was unhappy always. Perhaps God chose the man she loved to be a priest; perhaps it was right that she should be unhappy. I do not know. But I do know that the good God has not chosen Don Miguel for a priest—someone has made a mistake. He can never make a true priest—he can never be happy! I know it—I know it—I know it!"

Her voice, lifted in an agony of appeal, rang insistently in the ears of Padre Vicente.

"It is not right that we should both suffer because someone has made a mistake. If he were truly called to be a priest, it would be different, but he is not called. Therefore we have not committed sin. But I could not go to him and say: 'You are mistaken—you love me—leave being a priest for my sake.' Santísima, no, I could not do that. So for a long time I prayed to the Holy Mother of God to tell me what to do. She put it into my heart to come to you, padre. You would understand. You

would know how to help me. No one else could." Her voice ceased.

Above the dash of the waves below the cliff sounded the shrill cry of a seagull. Among the little, white forget-me-nots in the grass a bee hummed noisily. For a while Padre Vicente said nothing. Then he turned to the woman at his side.

"Your faith in me is very great, my daughter," he said gently.

Impulsively Rafaela laid her slim hand across the work-stained fingers of the priest.

"You are like a saint," she said reverently. "I know that you can help me, and I know that you will."

Her touch, soft and light as the petals of living roses, sent a thrill of exquisite pain into the heart of Padre Vicente. His hand trembled, and he drew it away. He had known only the fragrance—he had never touched the petals of his roses.

"I am no saint at all, my daughter," he said slowly, and there was a little choke in his voice. "I am only a man—weak and tempted as other men are. But I think that I can help you, and what I can, I will do."

Joy transfigured the face of Rafaela. Tears trembled in her clear eyes.

"Padre," she whispered, "padre! I would



give my soul for you—I could pray to you if you would let me, padre!” She clasped her hands, and would have knelt before him, but with a look of pain in his eyes, he motioned her back. They both arose.

“Daughter, I am not worthy that anyone should pray to me,” said the priest humbly. “God knows that I am most unworthy. But I will write to Don Miguel to come. You shall have what is your own, beloved.”

How should Rafaela know that the tender light in his eyes was not for her alone?

“I will kneel before you, padre,” she protested earnestly, “for your blessing. I ask one more thing at your hands—your blessing.” Silently she sank to her knees in the grass at his feet, and bowed her head. Padre Vicente lifted his eyes to heaven, and extended his hand in a gesture of benediction.

“May the good God bless you and keep you,” he said.

When the girl rose, her face was like the face of the angel in the sacristy at San Juan.

“Adiós, padre,” said Rafaela Montijo. Then she mounted her horse and rode away.

For a moment Padre Vicente stood gazing after her, until she disappeared in a dip of the hills. Then he set out and walked slowly back across the fields toward the Mission. When he

came there, he said not a word to anyone, but went straight to his little whitewashed room that opened off the courtyard colonnade. Sitting down at the square table before the recessed window, he took out a sheet of coarse, grayish white paper; and, dipping his quill in the old carved silver inkstand, wrote the following letter in a firm hand:

"Hijo Mío:

"When this comes to your hand, leave everything, and come to San Juan Capistrano at once. Why, I cannot explain here; but I think you will not be sorry hereafter. I have a very important message for you, and I would that you lingered not at all, but made whatever speed possible.

"May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, be with you.

"Padre Vicente Artillaga."

With great deliberation, the priest dried the ink and folded the paper. He traced the superscription in his precise, Spanish hand; then, heating a stick of dark red wax in the flame of a candle that burned before the Christ in the niche by the window, he sealed the paper. The letter was finished and ready to send. With care, Padre Vicente placed it on the corner of the table.

For a moment the priest looked out through



the rose-vines as if he saw someone a great way beyond them; but the corridor outside was deserted. A strange expression crossed his face. Lifting to his lips the fingers that the hand of Rafaela had touched, he kissed them passionately. Then he hid his face in his hands on the table where the picture of Rafaela had lain, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### The Cloister Gate

A CLEAR DAY at that season of the year in Alta California when winter drifts almost imperceptibly into spring. A gentle breath of wind urging lazily before it masses of cloud as soft and white as a seagull's breast; green hills and fields sown with blue and royal purple and red-gold; wide stretches of orchard fragrant under a gently-tossing foam of wonderful pink and white bloom; the cheerful crackle of flocking black-birds and the liquid note of a meadowlark; new life everywhere—new life rejoicing in its own strength, new life rejoicing in the world-old call to a new love. Late on the afternoon of such a day as this, Miguel rode into San Juan Capistrano on the King's Highway, and cared not at all for the glory of field or hill or sky. The blue of heaven might have been hidden behind lowering clouds, the blooming fields wrapped in gray rain, the birds silent; he would not have cared at all. Last spring he had galloped madly southward on the King's Highway, his head awhirl with joy, his heart on fire. This spring he rode back at a



walk, and the weary feet of his crawling mount were not heavier than his heart.

At the Mission gate, a little group of Mexican cavalrymen were bickering with a crowd of Indians over a basket of fish. The Mexicans glanced curiously at the tall, young man astride the gray horse, but the Indians made way for him respectfully. They knew Don Miguel de Dios Artillaga, but it was evident that they were surprised to see him here. Though courteous, Miguel made short work of his greetings to the Indians; and, giving his horse into the hands of Juanito, he made his way into the Mission courtyard. Old Pablo, leaning on his stick in the afternoon sun, hobbled forward to meet him.

"Glory be to God!" wheezed the old man. "I had thought never to see Don Miguel more!"

"Dear Pablo," answered Miguel gently, "what I have come for, Dios sabe! Pablo, do you know where Padre Vicente is?"

"Sí, Don Miguel, sí," whispered old Pablo in his husky voice. "The good padre is in the almond orchard to look at the trees. He—"

But before the old Indian could finish, Miguel was crossing the courtyard. The dim eyes of old Pablo followed the young man

wistfully until he passed under an archway and was gone.

White and faintly pink like sea-spray in the pale rose of sunset, a delicate foam of bloom filled all the almond orchard with the pungent odor of fresh honey. The bees hummed lazily in the trees, and Padre Vicente, walking in the orchard, looked up to where their glistening wings flashed among the flowering branches. The promised yield was great; in the almond orchard the harvests were not yet over. The trees would go on blossoming and bearing fruit until they died or were cut down. Was it not also the will of the good God that His priest should remain faithful to the end?

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

As if he would search the heart of the flowers, Padre Vicente reached out his hand and drew a blossom-loaded branch toward him. The long, brown sleeve of his robe caught on a twig, and a shower of soft, white petals fluttered down, lodging on the priest's shoulders and in the folds of his robe. Then he heard a footfall on the ground behind him.

"Padre Vicente!" cried Miguel, and cast his arms about the priest's neck as he used to do when a child.

"Miguelito mío!" Almost unconsciously the



endearing, childish name slipped from the lips of Padre Vicente. The arm that he placed about the shoulders of the young man trembled, and Miguel felt it.

"Padre!" Miguel's voice was appealing. "Padre—I have a confession to make." Once more under the spell of the magnetic personality of the priest, he looked adoringly into the deep eyes. "You will forgive," he said loyally.

"You shall not confess to me." Padre Vicente's hand was steady now. He took it away from Miguel's shoulder, and stood looking tenderly into the young man's face. "I know everything, and there is nothing for me to forgive. Rather should I ask you to forgive me."

Blank amazement was written across Miguel's open countenance.

"But padre—" he began.

"There is no 'but,' hijo mío," interrupted the priest. "Let us sit down, and I will tell you why I sent for you to come."

Together the two sat down in the filmy shade of the almond trees.

"Miguelito mío," murmured Padre Vicente, caressingly, "Miguelito mío," I have loved you, hijo mío, more than you can ever know. But I have been mistaken. I thought that the good God had called you to be a priest to His people—I thought that you would be like new

life in the priesthood of Holy Church here in New Spain. It was my belief—my dream—you were as one sent—you were to do great things for my poor people. But I was mistaken. God has willed otherwise. He has not chosen you to be priest, hijo mío.”

Miguel flushed hotly under his dark skin.

“Padre—” he stammered painfully, but got no further.

“Thanks to the wisdom of the good God, I know that I have been mistaken,” the priest went on evenly. “I have seen her—Rafaela Montijo, and I know.”

All the blood left Miguel’s face.

“You have seen her—Rafaela Montijo—” he repeated blankly.

“Yes, I have seen her,” answered Padre Vicente. “You love her, Miguelito mío.” His voice was a bit unsteady, but he went on. “She loves you. Nothing must ever separate you from loving her—nothing else is worth while now.”

A curiously chastened look passed across the priest’s face. He laid his work-roughened hand over Miguel’s strong, brown one where it lay almost hidden in the grass.

“You do love her,” he said with the shade of a question in his tone.

With a sudden motion, Miguel buried his



face in Padre Vicente's coarse, brown robe. His shoulders heaved convulsively. Then he lifted his head, a hint of tears in his black velvet eyes.

"I love her—no one can ever know how much!" he whispered brokenly.

"I know," said Padre Vicente.

Startled, Miguel looked into the priest's eyes. As a child he had said to old Rosario: "My padre knows everything." A man now, he found that blind faith still unshaken. It did not occur to him to ask how Padre Vicente had come by his knowledge. With the easy acquiescence of one in a dream, the young man stared eagerly into the other's face.

"You love her," continued the priest calmly. "You shall marry her. You have made no vows to the Church; I release you from all promises to me. Go to her—take her in your arms—tell her that you love her. It shall be your happiness and mine."

But Miguel did not hear the last sentence. Shaking off the blank amazement that had clung to him, he sprang to his feet, brushing down a shower of snowy almond petals about his head. The light of a great love burned in his eyes, and for a moment he did not see the man in the coarse, brown robe in the shade at the foot of the tree. Instead, he saw Rafaela

Montijo as he had seen her on that last morning at the house of the lone poplar, a sort of exaltation in her eyes—the eyes that had shed tears for love of him.

"You must not ask her to share your poverty." Padre Vicente's words broke rudely in upon the young man's reverie. Miguel looked down and met the strangely detached gaze of the man under the tree.

"I have nothing of my own," said the man. "But there is a goodly sum held in trust for me in Spain—part of my father's fortune. It was not to be used for the Church, so it has never been touched. You shall have it all, Miguel of my heart."

Miguel's face changed. Swiftly he fell to his knees in the petal-strewn grass at the priest's sandalled feet.

"No—Santísima! no!" he cried penitently. "No—! I cannot take your money, padre! I do not deserve it—no—!"

"The money is not mine. You will take it—I command you to take it." Padre Vicente's voice was tender, yet there was something in it that would not brook opposition. A faint, inscrutable smile played about the corners of his mouth. "It is a very small part of a debt that I owe," he said. "It will help to make



you and someone else very happy. You will take the money."

Under the gentle dominance of the elder man's personality, Miguel bowed submissively.

"There is no way to thank you enough," he whispered.

The smile still hovered about the corners of the priest's mouth.

"A man does not require thanks for the payment of his just debts," he said firmly, and there was something in his eyes and his voice that kept Miguel from asking what that just debt was. "Get up, Miguel."

The young man rose to his feet. Then he turned his eyes upon Padre Vicente's face. The almond petals in the folds of the priest's robe were not whiter than the hair at his temples, and to Miguel it seemed that the man looked old and tired.

"Padre!" he cried unsteadily, "padre—you are tired! You have worked too hard here—you must leave it all—you must come to stay in the home that the money will buy! Say that you will come—padre mlo!"

For a moment the priest did not speak. His eyes were upon the peace of the scene about him—the calm before the storm.

"The good God knows that I should love to

be with you, Miguel," he said. "But my people need me—I am never tired of working for them. If anything should happen—to drive them out of their homes, they would need me more than ever. As long as they need me, I will stay. . . . But I shall always pray for the blessing of God upon you, Miguel, you and Rafaela Montijo."

At first, Miguel's face clouded, but at mention of Rafaela, joy flamed up in his eyes. At sight of the unspeakable happiness written there, the shadow of remembered pain flitted across Padre Vicente's strong features. He lifted his eyes to where the white almond flowers and the blue of heaven mingled in an exquisite mosaic of turquoise and pearl. Beyond the tossing foam of snowy bloom, a thin line of blue smoke curled slowly upward from the big kitchen chimney that looked so much like a fanciful dove-cote. Could cruel desolation ever lay waste this peaceful fold of Holy Church? Padre Vicente knew that it could. He stood up, and turned again to Miguel.

"Listen, hijo mío," he said slowly. "I am giving you only what is your own—your freedom. And the good God knows that in so far as I do give it to you, I give it out of a whole heart." He paused to lay his hand affection-



ately upon the other's head. "Your happiness shall be mine," he finished.

The wonderful joy in Miguel's eyes deepened.

"Madre de Dios, but you are a saint!" he cried impetuously, "a very saint from heaven—you—" But he got no farther.

"No," said Padre Vicente calmly, "not a saint, but a man very like other men." Suddenly his manner became imperious. "But you are going to her—to Rafaela Montijo," he went on almost eagerly. "You will want to start now—you are tired, but I know that you want to start now so that you can be in San Diego tomorrow morning."

Miguel stared at Padre Vicente. How should the priest be able to read his thoughts so plainly? All at once the young man realized that he had not asked a single question since the two had met in the orchard that afternoon. He had taken everything on faith, making no inquiries, and he made none now.

"You must have something to eat and to drink," went on the priest, and you must rest a while before you start. Then you will want a fresh horse." Padre Vicente's manner became strangely exalted. "You will reach San Diego in the morning. She will be waiting for you!" he cried joyfully. Then he placed his

two hands on the young man's shoulders, and looked steadfastly into the black velvet eyes.

"Hijo mío," he said in a voice that was vibrant with feeling, "hijo mío—you love Rafaela Montijo. You can never know a holier thing than love of her. Promise me that you will never let it go."

Miguel did not waver.

"I give my promise, padre," he said solemnly. "The good God knows I cannot choose but keep it."

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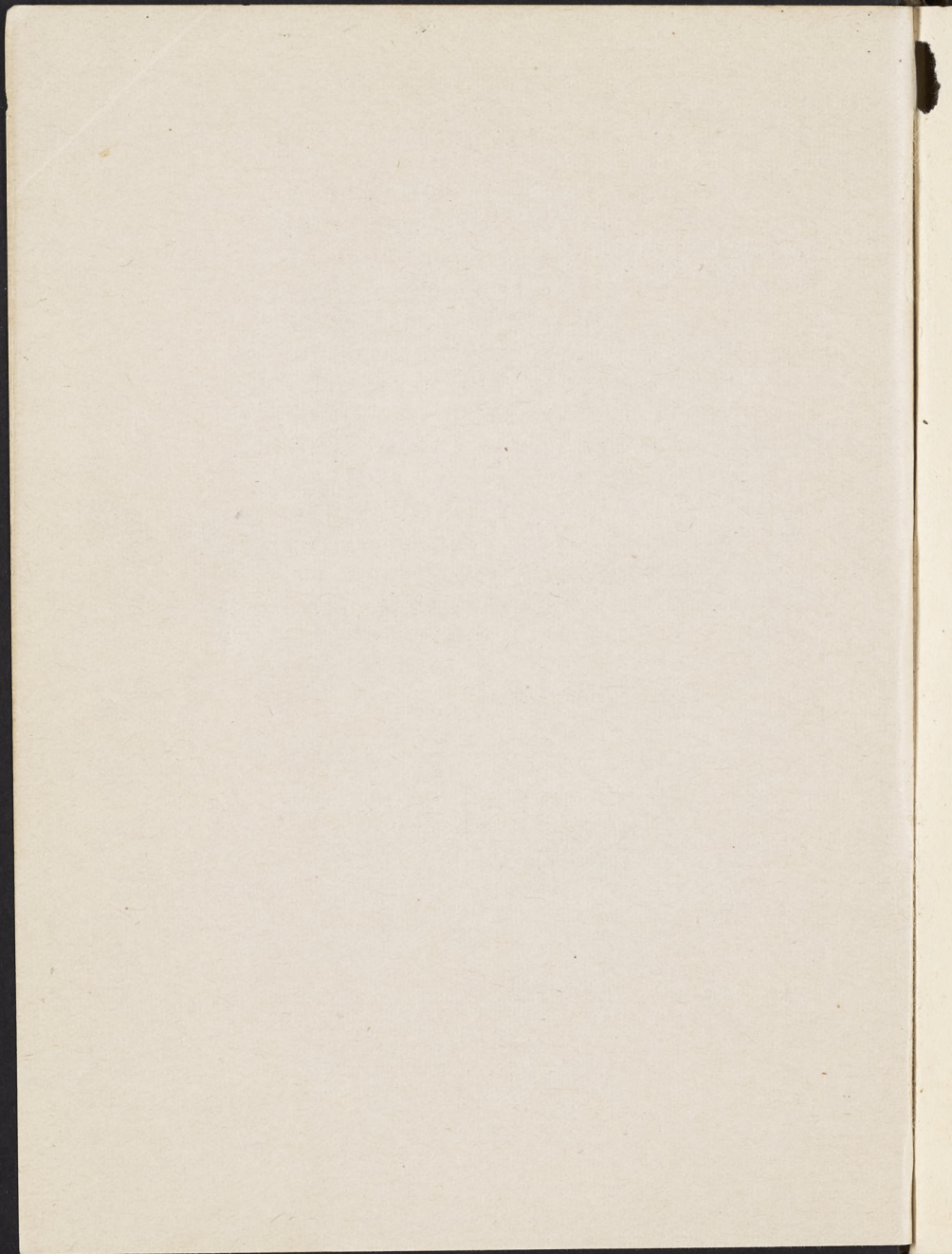
An hour passed. Over the valley of the Mission of the Crusader Saint burned the winter sunset, deepening into rose and fiery amethyst along the eastern hilltops. Southward on the King's Highway, between fields of sweet-breathed grass, rode Don Miguel de Dios Artillaga. In his face glowed joy unspeakable, in his heart joy unthinkable. He was tired, but he had forgotten that for love of Rafaela Montijo—and he would ride all night that he might see her and tell her of his love. From the thickets to the south of the little valley the long-drawn cry of a night bird foretold the coming darkness, but to Miguel the sound brought only a thrill of joy. He was going to her—Rafaela Montijo, and already the day had dawned in his heart.



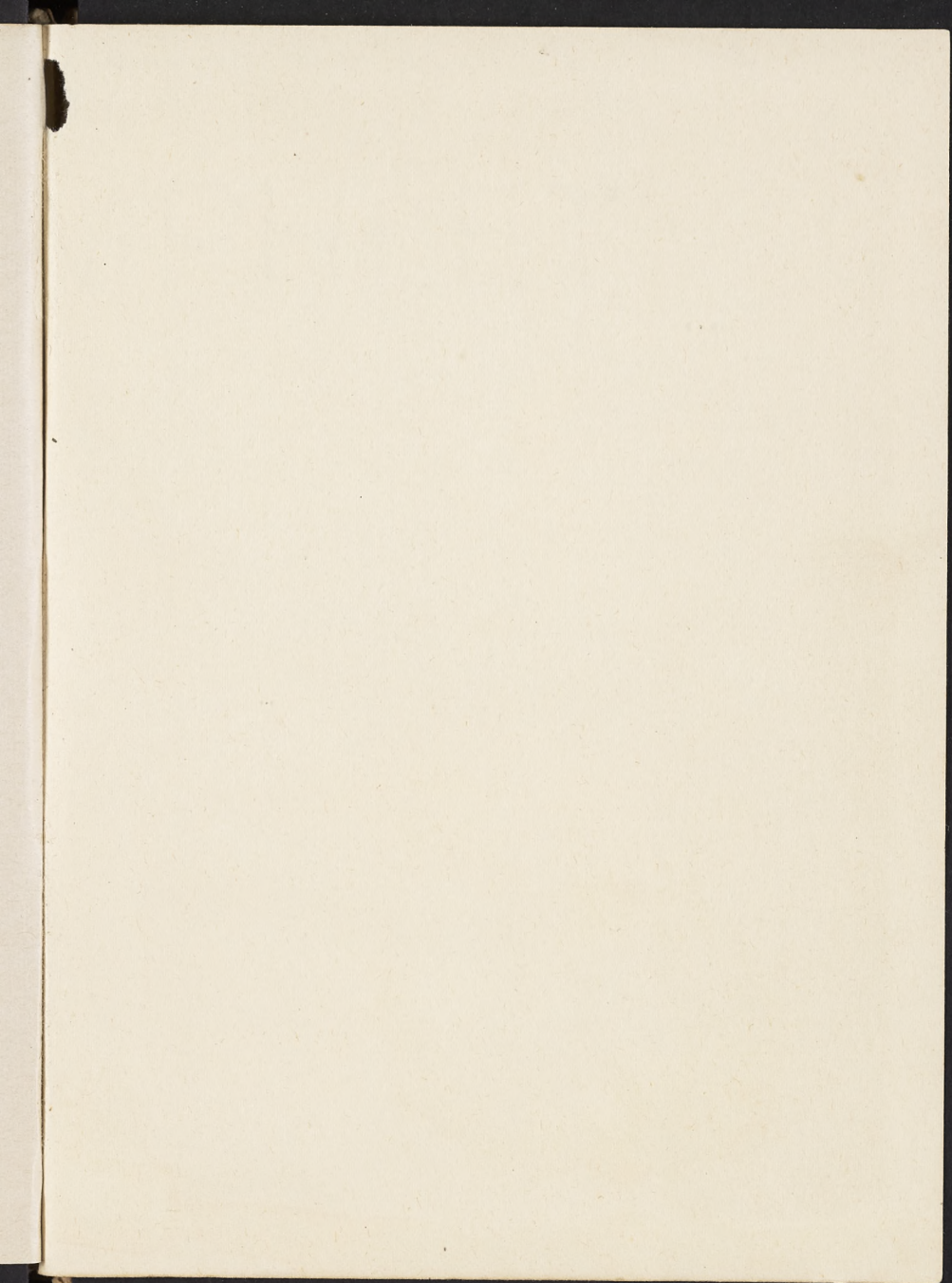
In a shadow by the Mission gate, Padre Vicente stood and watched Miguel until he disappeared over the hill on the King's Highway. From the cloisters came the murmur of voices, but the priest did not stir. For a long time he stood straining his eyes into the gathering dusk. When at last, ashes of roses had dulled all the gleaming amethyst and fire glow of the hill tops, he knelt for a moment, his eyes lifted to where the first star of evening glimmered palely. Slowly he rose to his feet. Again there came to his ears the uncertain murmur of happy, human voices. He turned now, and a faint smile crossed his face. Then he entered the cloister gate and shut it steadfastly behind him.

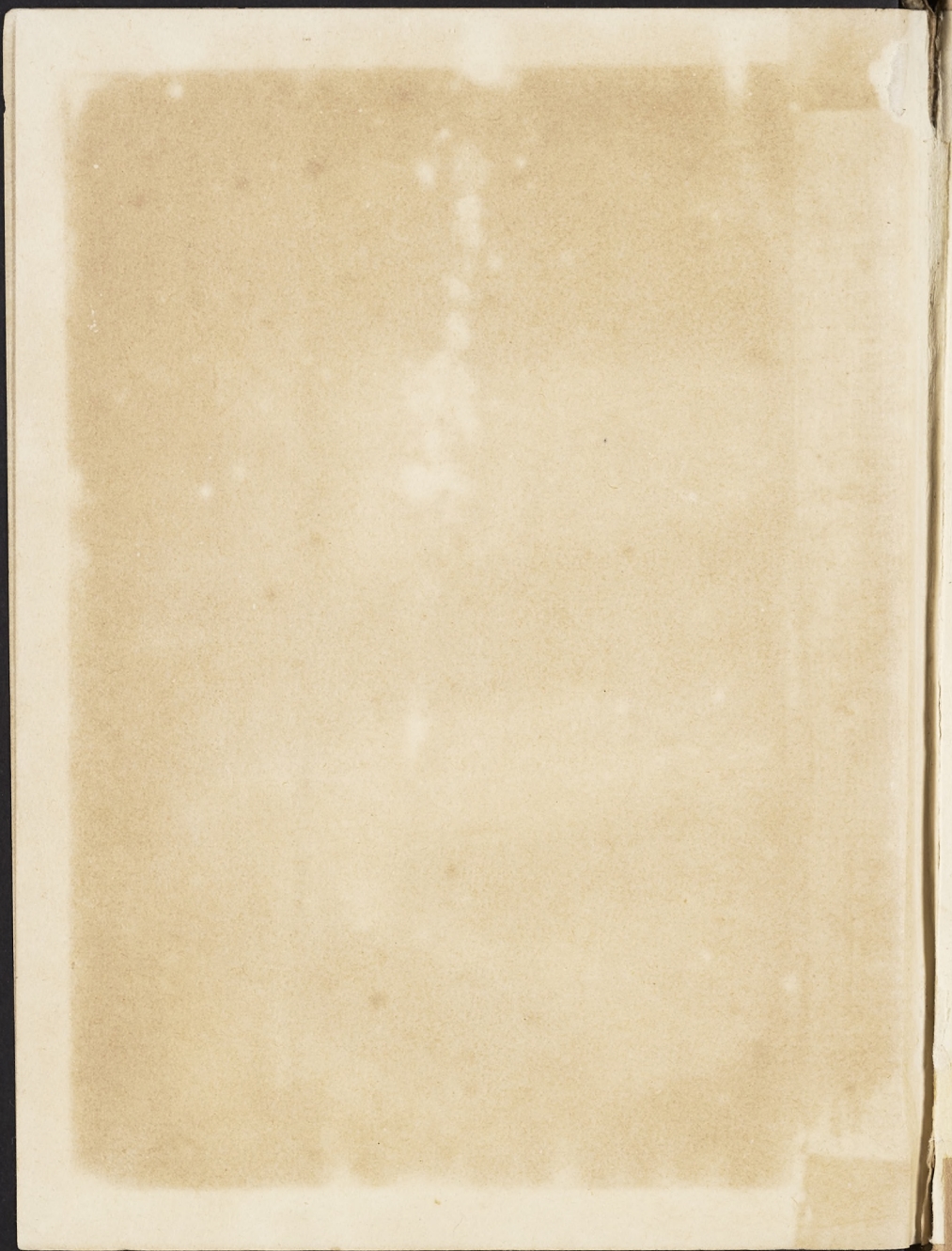
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